

‘An Event Elsewhere:’ The Vernacular Histories of Partition and the National Question in Kerala

A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
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BY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**‘An Event Elsewhere:’ The Vernacular Histories of Partition and the National Question in Kerala**” submitted by **Neethu Prasad** bearing registration number **14HCPH01** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature** from the University of Hyderabad is a bona fide research work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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The student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of her research:

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Course Code	Course Name	Credits	Pass/ Fail
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DECLARATION

I, **Neethu Prasad**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**An Event Elsewhere:’ The Vernacular Histories of Partition and the National Question in Kerala**” submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature embodies veritable research work carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. V. J. Varghese. I also declare that this thesis has not been submitted previously, in part or in full, to this or any other university or website for the award of any academic degree. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Neethu Prasad
14HCPH01

*To,
Amma and Achan,
for everything called love...*

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Introduction

Historical processes have long-lasting effects, contributing to the (un)making of identities- both individual and collective, and are historically contingent on the present in which it is constructed (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000). Therefore, these processes as significant texts as well as contexts continue to generate meanings of how individuals, communities and regions negotiate with such histories from their specific socio-political locations. Such processes elucidate not only the socio-political significance of the particular histories, but also capacitate and facilitate specific identity configurations to which one associates at individual and collective levels. Thus, historical processes are also (con)texts in which particular reformulations of regions take place besides the consolidation of communities and their politics. This study approaches the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 (henceforth Partition)¹ as a historical process from the vantage point of Kerala and analyses narratives from various historical junctures that engage with the question of Partition within the socio-political milieu of the region.² The study explores the ‘exceptional’ ways in which the region made sense of Partition during various points in time and fashioned itself in accordance with such ethnic consolidations while adhering to the itinerary of Kerala modernity.³ Taking off from the premise that distant occurrences of Partition, in imagination or reception, in diverse locations of the subcontinent will contribute to its conceptualisation as a process, the study

¹Besides the meaning as the event of the geographical bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the violence which constituted it, ‘Partition,’ in my use of the term, comprises the political, social, and personal impacts it produced.

²The linguistic state of Kerala was formed on 1st November 1956 by uniting the Malayalam speaking regions in the princely states of Travancore, Kochi and parts of Malabar district. However, the proposed study construes the historical category of ‘Kerala’ as not only the present linguistic state, but also as the Malayalam speaking geographical area of the pre-Independence era. Nevertheless, the role of the present state as a distinct region within the Indian nation-state and how it influences the discussions of Partition in Kerala is also an important aspect of the study.

³The theme of Kerala modernity is developed into a discourse on its own in the academic enquiries on Kerala. The discourse is briefly explored in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, as an intrinsic feature of the socio-political milieu of Kerala and its ‘exceptional’ community configurations. For a detailed analysis of the trajectory of Kerala modernity and its constructive role in shaping the region, see Jeffrey (1992); Osella and Osella (2001); Devika (2013); Bose and Varughese (2015).

establishes how the ideas of Partition are intrinsically woven into the local histories of communities, religious coexistence and identities in the derivative⁴ contexts.

The recent political turmoil the nation witnessed following the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has once again brought the perennial ‘Muslim question’ in the forefront of discussions on citizenship in India.⁵ The Act, which explicitly omits Muslim community from its purview, tampers with the nation’s religious plurality which is vested on political secularism. Moreover, it has also initiated a discussion around Partition being a defining moment in the history of citizenship in the subcontinent. The arguments put forward by both the supporters and critics of these constitutional amendments have made Partition their frequent reference point, reminding us of the historical residues left by Partition in the history and present of communalism in India. Apart from the classical nationalist narratives, the rising Hindutva further augments an overplay of Partition in the nationalist narratives to conceptualise the process as ‘sectarian’ and essentially concerned with Muslims. There were frequent attempts on the part of Hindu right-wing organisations to paint the widespread anti-CAA protests as religiously motivated and alleged to be fostering the Hindu-Muslim binary (Desai 2020).⁶

During the context of CAA and NRC, Partition has once again surfaced as a pertinent question to be addressed in the discussions of Indian citizenship. The protests made possible a political constellation of various identities, constituting the students from the Jamia Millia

⁴As Gyanendra Pandey has rightly pointed out, the Partition narratives have been developed mainly from the north-western and north-eastern part of the subcontinent where the event has stuck physically (2001, 25). While presuming the distant contexts like Kerala as derivatives, the study argues that the vernacular narratives are considered not as dichotomies but looks at how the discussions from these locations inform and intersect the existing discourse.

⁵On 11th December 2019, the Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, revising the Citizenship Act of 1955. According to the Act, the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan could become Indian citizens. The fundamental criticism of the Act has been that it specifically targets Muslims.

⁶In the wake of massive protests that broke out in the country against a CAA, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, remarked that the protesters can be identified by their clothes (*The Hindu* 2019). This statement marks how the current regime interpreted the entire protest as religiously motivated and anti-national.

Islamia (JMI) University in Delhi and the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in Uttar Pradesh and the women of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi.⁷ However, an essential Muslim identity is also highlighted during these protests owing to the political significance of these public institutions such as JMI and AMU in the life of the Muslim community in India.⁸ While Partition is repeatedly invoked as a defining moment at this significant political juncture, there are multiple stakeholders attempting divergent political meanings to these histories. The supporters of these amendments, especially the state regime led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claim to rectify the political errors left by Partition by granting citizenship to the religious minorities from Pakistan and Bangladesh. In contrast, the critics of CAA and NRC have expressed the fear that Muslims will be further discriminated in the proposed idea of the nation after the implementation of the act, which the community has been arguably experiencing since Partition (Devy 2020). Interestingly, the protests in the north-eastern part of India against the amendments suggest another political reality impinged by Partition where the indigenous people have expressed strong objections against the refugees being given citizenship as they perceive these refugees as the residues forced upon them by Partition (Serhan 2019). The current political climate in the country, where the right-wing formations have achieved political ascendancy, witnesses constant invocation of Partition in relation to ‘the Muslim question.’ This affirms the continuing role of Partition in defining religious identities and communal politics⁹ in the subcontinent, of which CAA and NRC are the latest manifestations. Apart from

⁷As part of the nation-wide protests against CAA and NRC, a group of elderly Muslim women initiated a protest at Shaheen Bagh in South Delhi district, Delhi, on 15th December 2020. The central figure of the protest was the octogenarian Bilkis, who later became the symbol of women resistance against CAA (Farooqi 2020).

⁸Established in 1875 as Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh Muslim University was founded in 1920 following the Aligarh Muslim University Act. The University is considered the product of the Aligarh Movement, which focused on enabling a modern system of education for Muslims. The University has also played a prominent role in the movement for Pakistan. Nevertheless, JMI, the National Muslim University was established in 1920 following a demand from a section of AMU students for a national university for Muslims. The demand for the sovereign status of the university, different from that of the AMU which was under the aegis of the British government, was the driving force behind its establishment (Gautier 2019).

⁹In my usage, ‘communal politics’ refers to the politics that revolves around religious and community identities. Nevertheless, in the Indian context often, the term assumes the political lenience observed in any particular religious community, adhering to their religious identities. In Kerala, the term acquires a greater significance in

these intangible dimensions of Partition in India's contemporary life, the events of 1947 have been continuing in its physical manifestations, especially in the frontier regions as evidenced in the conflicts over Kashmir and the harrowing refugee question in the eastern regions. As a result, new terrains have been unearthed in the Partition landscape where the impacts have been divergent in terms of locations and subjectivities involved. Such varied political repercussions and interpretive possibilities that make Partition significantly relevant in the contemporary life of the subcontinent necessitates further inquiries to unravel how Partition found its ceaseless afterlives at the national, regional and local arenas.

In the present study, I explore the vernacular experiences of Partition, one of the most eventful and catastrophic moments in the subcontinent's history, by considering Kerala, the southernmost state of India, as an unexplored fragment in the repertoire of Partition studies. Academic studies on Partition have largely remained regionally contingent, centring on the northern part of the subcontinent where the event has struck physically (Pandey 2001, 25). The vernacular narratives around the event, regardless of the absence of any direct physical encounter with the same, have underscored Partition as a continuing process in the subcontinent's political, religious, and social lives. By engaging with the discourse of Partition in the context of Kerala, where the "dissident genealogy" of Kerala modernity offers "extraordinary claims of exceptionalism" in relation to its communitarian consciousness,¹⁰ I interrogate the prevalent blind spot in the academic studies and popular memories on Partition that this far-reaching event did not considerably affect south India. Through the deployment of distant 'vernacular' contexts into the Partition discourse, this project departs from Partition's

the context of the Indian Union Muslim League and the activities and the Kerala Congress. For more specific discussions on the regional manifestations of community vs. 'communal' politics in Kerala, see Mathew (1989); Chiriyankandath (1996); Menon (2006); Devika and Varghese (2010).

¹⁰V. J. Varghese discusses Kerala's "extraordinary claims of exceptionalism" by bringing together the articles that touch upon varied instances of the "dissident genealogy" of modernity in the region (2012-13, 1-7).

north Indian-centric narratives and explores how it was felt and experienced in a region like Kerala in the south. Accounts of vernacular experiences of Partition are derived from local trajectories of religious coexistence and community politics that shape the region's administrative decisions, cultural expressions, and everyday life.

Partition, thus, continues to be a spectral presence creating divergent meanings in the lives of the people at different historical junctures and locations. A substantial amount of intellectual energies have been invested in making sense of the historical event and its impact, as it has continued to impart varied meanings to the everyday life of the subcontinent. The significant interventions of Urvashi Butalia, Gyanendra Pandey, Mushirul Hasan and Ayesha Jalal demonstrate how the geographical bifurcation, displacement and violence engendered not only the nation-states of India and Pakistan but also reconstituted various identities within these borders. Though varied in terms of their points of enquiry in terms of gender, community and class, these narratives have north-western and eastern parts of India as their locus as these regions were partitioned physically and witnessed the unprecedented violence it unleashed. However, the conception of Partition as a historical process that continues to inform and affect various communities in the subcontinent explains the rationale in bringing other regions like Kerala, which were not physically partitioned and did not essentially witness the violence and refugee flows it engendered, into the story of Partition.

Partition also engendered new forms of spatial imaginations. It envisaged a new regional imagery out of the socially, culturally and linguistically distinctive fragments (Chatterjee 1993) and religion became a primary category to conceive any 'national region.' Thus, Partition has become central to the imagining of a nation. The re-imaginings of the idea of 'region' also necessitated the need to figure a new 'other' in its spatial and temporal specificities. The imagining of the national 'region' on a religious and secular basis led to the national othering of Muslims (Devji 1992). Thus, the Muslim figure is communalised in the discourse around

Partition, and Muslims have become the natural other in the secular ‘region’ of post-Partition India (Devji 1992). By engaging with the narratives from Kerala around Partition, I establish that the historiography of Partition has failed to do justice to the southern perception of the event, which provides us with significant ways of remembering Partition. How these regions, with multi-religious societies and relatively peaceful coexistence, experience the bifurcation of the subcontinent on a religious basis has never been seriously discussed, and as a result, Partition is predominantly conceived as violence happened elsewhere in the popular memory.

The region of Kerala with its distinct political and religious integrals has debated and experienced Partition in its own ways. It found expression in varied arenas of the region’s political, religious and cultural life. It is an analysis of some of these instances during which Partition made significant appearances in the region’s public life that forms the crux of this study. It is in the writings associated with the Progressive Writers’ Movement in Kerala during the twentieth century, characterised by socialist realism, that one sees the early signs of Kerala’s literary responses to Partition.¹¹ For instance, *Bhranthalayam* [Mental Asylum 1948], a novel by P. Kesavadev, portrays the anxieties unleashed by Partition within the region of Kerala. The novel attempts to narrate the lives in the region to the social and political turmoil during a particular historical juncture. Furthermore, it implicates Partition as the reason for the growing religious tensions in the society. The debates around the formation of Malappuram district in 1969 offers another instance of the invocation of Partition. The district’s population with Muslims in the majority was perceived to be the prototype of the geographical imaginations associated with Partition. Finally, the precarious lives of the Pakistani passport holders of Indian origin living in Kerala are analysed in order to highlight the ‘everyday’

¹¹A detailed discussion of the Progressive Writers Movement and Social Realism in Malayalam literature is given in Chapter 2.

underpinnings and after-life of Partition in the region. The Partition narratives in Kerala, selected from three different historical points in time are as diverse in terms of their genre-literary writings of PWM, the administrative expediencies of the Kerala Legislative Assembly debates and the everyday experiences of the Pakistani citizens in Kerala.

The region's experience of modernity has been a significant theme pertinent to most of the academic discussions on Kerala as a linguistic state within the Indian federal system.¹² These studies engaged with the question of how the experience of modernity has shaped the region into a unique political as well as socio-cultural entity. Furthermore, even the pre-modern imaginations of the region, as illustrated in the works of M.G.S. Narayanan (1972) and Kesavan Veluthat (1977) highlighted the region's uniqueness, which became the appropriate base for modern imaginations of the region. The trajectory of Kerala modernity has been pertinent to the studies on various caste-religious communities in the region. Thus, the region's experience of modernity has been arguably one of the significant catalysts in various political and social changes and their manifestations in the realms of communities (Menon 2010). However, the question of its repercussions in specific locations may not be tantamount to the logic of modernity on which the region is thriving (Menon 2010).

Kerala is home to diverse religious, caste and linguistic communities. The social imaginaries within Kerala have always been diverse, making the region vibrant and distinct with possibilities of various manifestations of communities and their politics. Apart from the presence of a majority Hindu population (54.73%), the state has significant minority religions like Islam (26.56%) and Christianity (18.38%), in its population.¹³ The religious demographics

¹²In comparison with the rest of the country, the historical trajectory of the region with a multi-religious social fabric, colonial interventions and a political salience marked by diverse socio-political movements have led to the identification of Kerala as a distinct entity. Apart from these historical factors, an 'exceptional' character, has been attributed to Kerala owing to the ways in which various communities have coexisted in the region with a strong adherence to the principle of political secularism. This trajectory of 'exceptionalism' is explored in Chapter 2.

¹³Government of India Census Records, 2011.

<https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-common/censusdata2011.html> (accessed on July 25, 2018).

of the state validates the prolonged presence of a multi-religious social fabric throughout the history of the region. Adding to its multi-religious society, the caste communities, with their contesting histories and varied cultures, complimented the fragmented nature of Kerala's social situation. The formation of Kerala, merging the princely states of Travancore and Kochi and the Malabar region, which was under the Madras Presidency, with their own specific histories of communities as well as colonial experience have also added to the unique historical formation and heterogeneities of the region.¹⁴

Though varied based on lifeworld, the community configurations have attempted to find their coherence by discerning a political and social imaginary legitimated by the political secularism in India (Chiriyankandath 1996). During the twentieth century, the strengthening of (Hindu) nationalist ideologies tried to enforce a monolithic imagination of community among the religious minorities and they strived to establish themselves as a homogenous group erasing the differences within (Devika and Varghese 2010). This trend has been one of the ways in which the religious minorities asserted their political legitimacy in Kerala. Furthermore, the Muslim community in Kerala where the Indian Union Muslim League (henceforth, IUML)¹⁵ been the most visible political face since independence, dissociated itself from the possibility of a national consolidation, at least on the political front, for the Muslims in India. Instead, they tend to exhibit and assert their regional character often conforming to the proclaimed secular milieu of Kerala's political fabric (Santhosh and Visakh 2020).

In the discussions on the Muslim community in Kerala, Partition becomes another important context that impinges on the region's discreet political, social, religious, and cultural

¹⁴The present linguistic state of Kerala is formed was formed by integrating the princely states of Travancore in the south, Kochi in the central region and Malabar, a district directly under the Madras presidency during the colonial period. For a brief discussion on the princely states and the Malabar district, see Jeffrey (1992, 25-33).

¹⁵The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), popularly known as Muslim League, was formed on 10 March 1948 and has become one of the most significant platforms for Muslim community politics in the post-Partition days. How the party has served as a political model for the mobilisation of Muslims in a post-Partition India is discussed in Chapter 4.

dynamics. Partition and the changes it followed have provided reasons for the IUML to emerge as a significant political voice, representing the Muslim minority of the region. The claim for ‘Mappilastan’¹⁶ and the IUML’s stance over the issue has also significantly changed the contours of community-based politics in Malabar.¹⁷ However, the demand that has often been associated with the formation of the district of Malappuram in 1969 engendered a different course of community-based politics and inter-religious affinities in Kerala. The polarisation of religious identities developed during the Malabar Rebellion¹⁸ has been intensified after Partition, owing to such repercussions. The social and cultural artefacts like literature and cinema have also carried the reverberations of Partition’s political and religious dimensions. The novels like *Amina* (1948) by Uroob; short stories like “Veerendar Majumdarinte Amma” [Mother of Veerendar Majumdar 1949] and “Kodunkattil Petta Ila” [A Leaf in the Storm 1949] by Lalithambika Antharjanam; “Gandhijiyude Anthyam” [The Death of Gandhi 1950] by Thakazhi; “Makhan Singhinte Maranam” [The Death of Makhan Singh 1958] by T. Padmanabhan are a few examples of Partition induced stories in Malayalam. Thus, the ways in which Partition is implicated in the region’s cultural imagination, its administrative expediencies and everyday lives, conditioning and affecting the inter-community relations and minoritarian positions is explored in the study.

¹⁶The claim for a Muslim dominated state constituting some of the regions of north Malabar developed in the Madras union of the All-India Muslim League (AIML) following Partition. However, it turned out to be a vain effort as the demand failed to gain popularity even among members of the party. How the demand has resurfaced in the public domain of Kerala indicative of Muslim separatism is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁷Malabar is an area of south India lying between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. During the colonial period, it was a district, part of the British Madras Presidency that included the northern half of Kerala and some coastal regions of present-day Karnataka. In ancient times, the term Malabar was used to denote the entire south-western coast of the Indian peninsula. However, today, Malabar is used synonymously with the former Malabar district or the northern districts of Kerala state (Dale 1980; Miller 1992; Gupta 1967).

¹⁸The peasant uprising, popularly known as the ‘Mappila Rebellion,’ consists of a series of agitations starting from 1836. The most serious and violent of these outbreaks happened in 1921, commonly referred to as Malabar Rebellion. A brief discussion on the Rebellion is attempted in Chapter 2.

Partha Chatterjee's "Communities in the East" (1998) questions the narrow and impoverished concept of community employed in Western political thought for the centrality given to the nation as the only possible modern political community. According to Chatterjee, it is incompatible with the political and social practices in the East (1998, 277). Rejecting the notion that community and capital are antithetical, Chatterjee brings in the notion of social capital to define the communities in the east (280). In an attempt to envisage a form of civic community based on social capital, he argues that "there were several elements in their tradition that were distinctively national, different from the Western, but nevertheless entirely consistent with the modern" (1998, 278). The significance of Chatterjee's conceptualisation lies in identifying the communitarian values and solidarities in the east as the intrinsic feature of Eastern modernity. Kerala has been acclaimed for an experience of modernity that has been significantly configured through the endeavours from community locations (Osella and Osella 2001, 9). Furthermore, it accommodated communities in its developmental strategies, where communities have played a significant role as mobilising factors and beneficiaries.¹⁹ However, Kerala's 'exceptional' communitarian realm deviates from Chatterjee's proposition of inner/spiritual sphere as the anchoring domain of Indian nationalism (Chatterjee 1998). Instead, the region holds its distinctive identity through its adherence to political secularism and unique developmental discourse (Devika and Varghese 2010). In his discussions on the eastern communities, Chatterjee observes that "these traditional community structures have more effective civilisational resources than the institutions of the modern state to resolve disputes, tolerate difference and allow for the development of a better adjusted and more accommodative personality" (1998, 278). Focusing on the city of Kochi, a similar observation has been made by Asish Nandy on the inter-community relations in Kerala (2000). According to Nandy, the sustained ethnic tolerance and absence of communal violence in the region has been the result

¹⁹The point is discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

of a pre-colonial tradition of cultural plurality and active inter-community networks (2000). These ‘inter-community civic engagements’ in Kerala, based on a syncretic co-existence have often been projected as central to the social life in the region, which is significantly inherited from its pre-modern past (Varshney 2002). By exploring the continuing spectre of Partition in Kerala, the present study problematises this exceptional communitarian realm of Kerala by analysing the interplay of the nation, community and region in selected narratives.

Objectives of the Study

The study foregrounds Partition as an experience through which the nation is being reiterated in various forms. An engagement with the way Partition has been represented in Malayalam narratives offers us a possibility to widen our understanding of Partition and thereby enabling us to critically engage with the questions of nationalism and Hindu-Muslim relationships in Kerala. It will also help us to understand how the convulsions of 1947 and its aftereffects impacted Kerala, and thus, get mediated into a pan-Indian event. However, the study attempts to seek the manifestations of Partition beyond its over-emphasised significance in constituting the category of the nation by bringing in contexts like Kerala where the regional imagination has been a prominent part of the political subject called the citizen. Thus, the study’s objectives involve exploring the decisive role played by Partition in defining the national question in Kerala and analysing the communitarian social fabric in the region. By focusing exclusively on the political contexts of Malappuram formation, the postcolonial reincarnations of the event in its vernacular contexts are analysed. Furthermore, Partition’s role in defining the category of Muslims in India and its contribution in reconstituting the ‘Mappila’ identity during such reincarnations are central questions addressed in the study. While

exploring its continuing effects, how the indeterminate subjectivities produced by Partition invalidate the earlier histories of transaction and affinities is also closely examined.

Research Questions

- Do the Partition Narratives in Malayalam confirm a vernacular understanding of Partition? Can they be considered as testimonies for the impact of Partition on Kerala? Do they attempt to mobilise a pan-Indian sentiment of Partition?
- What role do the literary narratives play in creating a southern perception of Partition? How do these texts invoke Partition in the context of an emerging nation?
- Did Partition, in its reincarnations, instigate new regional imaginaries in Kerala as evident in the discussions on the formation of Malappuram district? How do such reincarnations interfere with the history of communalism and in the process of othering of the minority identities in the district? Did it also trigger regionally specific community politics as in the case of the IUML?
- Did the Partition of 1947 instigate new subjective formations within Kerala? How does the figure of 'Paradesi' become a new regional other in post-Partition India in general and in Kerala in particular?

Methodology

The present study has adopted the possibilities of interdisciplinary research in order to situate itself within the discipline of comparative literary studies. Understanding the 'mutual permeability of literature and history,' the study not only conceives literature as archives but also analyses the archive as narratives. The primary method used in the study is that of textual as well as contextual analysis. Critical discourse analysis has been employed to historicise Partition in southern contexts like that of Kerala. The research draws from different sets of

sources- literature, magazines and newspapers and also party documents. Contemporary media and cinematic creations are also analysed in the study. Moreover, the reports on the Kerala Legislative Assembly debates on the formation of the Malappuram district are utilised. Personal interviews are included in order to analyse the everyday experiences of Pakistani citizens in Kerala. Thus, the study engages with a melange of narratives, varied in genre and temporalities from the 1940s to 2020.

The thesis draws on several conceptual frameworks to elucidate Partition as a historical process in Kerala. Initially, a critical analysis of the discourse on Partition is attempted to carve out its significance in the making and unmaking of communities in the subcontinent. The study will be situated within the broader theoretical framework of the critique of the ‘modern nation-state’ for its exclusions and marginalisations. However, the nation as the anchoring point in Partition histories is brought under introspection using the pertinent frameworks enabled by the Partition scholarship post-1990.²⁰ The study attempts to conceptualise Partition beyond the singular nation question and thus enables the analysis of the region of Kerala in its implication into the histories of Partition through its diverse meanings and ramifications. Community has been a central trope in the histories of Partition through which an idea of a homogenous Muslim community within the Indian subcontinent has been brought to the fore; the present exercise complicates such an imagined homogeneity by bringing in the case of the Muslim community of Kerala as the stakeholders of Partition experience with their own specific social and political histories.

Comparative literary studies have been an important arena which opened up new theoretical domains in understanding historical phenomena across the globe. The present study, concentrating on the narratives on Partition, brings in the cultural narratives of literature, memory and orality, and the administrative language of the postcolonial state into the repertoire

²⁰Discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

of historical archives. These multifaceted narratives help in raising questions about the “constructed nature of experience, how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured, about language (and discourse), about history” (Scott 1991). As the study explores the impact of Partition in Kerala through fictional, semi-fictional, oral narratives and administrative documents, it identifies and constitutes a vernacular archive of the historical process called Partition. My enquiry into the Partition archive in the vernacular context of Kerala, based on these narratives, analyses the historical context of textual production as well. It will help in situating Partition in the theoretical frameworks of similar historical processes. An exploration of Partition as a process by transcending the regional, linguistic, and religious and caste-class limits that have hitherto restrained its perspectives is made possible in the process. The study unravels the manner in which the national framing of the event creates frictions within the regional spaces that have their own particular community configurations and histories. It opens up further possibilities for understanding the regional and community identities like *Malayalee*²¹ and ‘Mappila’²² in relation to the ‘national’ identity.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis comprises five chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion.

Chapter 1: Understanding Partition as a Process

In order to situate the present work in the larger context of studies on Partition, the chapter provides an overview of the repertoire of Partition studies which foregrounds Partition as a spectral presence in the histories of nationhood, community politics and religious identities in India. The history around Partition is explored through various thematic paradigms, including

²¹*Malayalee* is the term used to refer to the people of Kerala, meaning those who speak the language Malayalam.

²²A generic term used to describe the Muslim community in Malabar which is included in the northern part of present Kerala. For a detailed discussion on Mappilas, refer Miller (1992).

the nationalist histories, feminist interventions, community questions, and literary studies. This chapter primarily focuses on exploring the ways in which the dominant national community negotiated with other possible imaginings of collectives and how historical processes like Partition become contexts to the reiterations and contestations of the nation-state. The works of Gyanendra Pandey, Urvashi Butalia, Ayesha Jalal, Alok Bhalla, Faizal Devji, Venkat Dhulipala, and Rita Kothari are analysed in the process.

The chapter foregrounds Partition as a historical process through a critical evaluation of these narratives from divergent vantage positions, which have continued to reveal unexplored landscapes and subjective formations in its repertoire. The attempt is to place Partition within the conceptual categories that explain historical processes that shape identity formations and social relations. It will direct us to the ways in which the past and its memories become formative in the possible imaginations of collectives and their politics in similar contexts, albeit with specific differences. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the existing studies on Partition as regionally contingent, and contests the absence of narratives from the southern part of the subcontinent in the academic and popular discourses around Partition.

Chapter 2: Imagining the Region: ‘Exceptionalism’ in Kerala

Focusing on the twentieth-century socio-political scenario of Kerala, the second chapter examines the trajectory of a distinct communitarian consciousness that is foregrounded in a strong sub-national imagination in the region. In doing so, the narrative of ‘exceptionalism’ attributed to the region from various temporalities and locations is explored. However, rather than attempting to trace the linear history of the region and communities, the chapter analyses its various manifestations in the political milieu of Kerala, which helps the diverse communities in the region to be stakeholders in the communitarian public realm of society. The attempt is to understand the mobilising factors behind various socio-political movements and the way

community identities were incorporated. The chapter also traces how the reformist and developmental ideologies adopted by various communities have often enabled a new imaginary beyond narrow community interests. The chapter analyses this ‘unique Kerala model’ with the help of existing scholarship– George Mathew (1989), James Chiriyankandath (1993), Ashis Nandy (2000), Ashutosh Varshney (2002), J. Devika (2007), J Devika and V. J. Varghese (2010), and Nissim Mannathukkaren (2016)– which attempted to unravel the unique nature of community mobilisations in Kerala.

Given that communities are significant actors in the political processes that shape the region, discussions of Partition in the region are intrinsically related to the community configurations that are not limited to the religious categories of Hindu and Muslim. By locating particular historical events that gave new and distinctive definitions to the community, the chapter presents a backdrop that would complement and explain the *Malayalee* perceptions of Partition. Considering the specific instances of community mobilisations in Kerala, it unravels how solidarities are created, and communities are (re)constituted during such movements. Thus, the chapter examines the incorporation of religion/community as a political tool in Kerala in order to understand its manifestations in the selected Partition narratives. To these conceptions of community, placed within a strong regional identity, I locate Partition as a collective experience and a paradigmatic moment for the religious communities, especially Muslims, and their political belonging in the region.

Chapter 3: ‘Writing it off’ as Madness: Reading Partition in Select Literary Writings in Malayalam

The Progressive Writers’ Movement in Malayalam literature produced narratives that directly engaged with the theme of Partition. Through a reading of these texts, the third chapter tries to historicise the experiences of Partition in the particular socio-political and religious

spheres of Kerala. For this purpose, the study deals with selected narratives from the tradition of the Progressive Writers Movement, such as Uroob's *Amina* (1948), Kesavadev's *Bhranthalayam* [Madhouse 1949] and "Gusthi" [Wrestling 1962], Lalithambika Anthrjanam's "Dhirendu Mazumdarinte Amma" [Mother of Dhirendu Mazumdar 1949] and "Kodumkaatilpetta Ila" [Leaf in the Storm 1949], Thakazhi's "Gandhijiyude Anthyam" [The Death of Gandhi 1950], and T. Padmanabhan's "Makhan Singhite Maranam" [The Death of Makhan Singh 1958].

As part of analysing these literary works as Partition narratives, the chapter discusses the literary turn in the Partition historiography by looking at the works of Gyanendra Pandey (1994), Alok Bhalla (1994, 1998), Mushirul Hasan (1998), Suvir Kaul (2001), Jill Didur (2006) and Kavita Daiya (2008). Through a critical analysis of these works, the chapter delineates the ways in which literary narratives have contributed to the histories of Partition, in order to contextualise selected narratives in its repertoire. Thus, the chapter engages with the perspectives that focus on the inter-relationship between literature and history. From documenting to re-presenting Partition, these narratives attempt vernacular commentaries on the concepts of 'nationalism,' 'community,' and 'history.'

The writers, predominantly belonging to the twentieth-century literary modernity of Malayalam, have been invested in the ideological enterprise of portraying the (sub)nationalist and socialist project of the Left interferences in the cultural sphere of Kerala. The writings are closely evaluated in the context of the emerging nation-state and the strengthening Left movement in Kerala in order to discuss the selected narratives as the vernacular commentaries on Partition. Tracing the discussions of growing communal polarisation in the society during Partition and the way religious identities are depicted in these narratives, the chapter analyses how the Progressive Writers Movement in Malayalam endorsed the (sub)nationalist perceptions of the definitions of nation and its citizens. Their attempt can be seen as a region's

portrayal of Partition distant from its physical manifestations and political contexts, yet, ‘pan-Indian’ in its nationalist ethos of condemning the violence and the marginalisation of minority communities. In order to analyse the social and political significance of the selected narratives as historical texts in the discourse of Partition and the region, these works are analysed in relation to the ‘exceptional’ socio-political scenario in Kerala.

Chapter 4: Reincarnations of Partition: Reading the Malappuram District Formation Debates

The formation of Malappuram district on 16th June, 1969 invoked Partition references owing to its population with a Muslim majority. The formation stirred up intense debates and protests, invoking the Two-nation theory and the ‘separatist’ politics of Muslims. The Kerala Legislative Assembly debates, political party documents and media reports are explored in this chapter to analyse how Partition is invoked in the discussions around the formation of a new administrative district. It helps in unravelling the communal tendencies evident in the normative understanding of the social design of the district. The apprehensions regarding the formation of Malappuram as a Muslim majority district are highlighted as the instances of the reincarnations of Partition in the Kerala public sphere. The chapter examines the regional imaginaries of contesting spaces instigated by Partition that challenges the secular spaces of the nation. Furthermore, the formation of Malappuram district and the regionally specific community politics of the IUML are discussed in the chapter as a possible model for minority politics in a post-Partition scenario in India.

The chapter delineates the details of the debates around the formation of Malappuram in order to understand how Partition is invoked in relation to formation of the new administrative unit. The debates in Kerala Legislative Assembly on the formation of a new district are brought into the analysis to identify the language of the postcolonial nation-state in conceiving social

imaginaries like Malappuram. Rochana Bajpai's observations (2000) in her analysis of the Indian Constituent Assembly debates are employed to understand how the official language of the postcolonial state conceives the minority question. Moreover, Malappuram is identified as a vernacular interpretation of Partition, which also directs to the (im)possibility of conceiving particular spaces within the Indian nation-state owing to the spectre of Partition.

Chapter 5: Contested Identities within the Nation: Being 'Paradesi' and the Partitioned Lives

The chapter looks at the historical processes involved in Partition, which altered the lives of many, particularly those who found themselves in a 'liminal' position across the borders of newly formed nations. The refugee question in the vernacular experiences of Partition and its ramifications in the discussions of citizenship in postcolonial India are explored by analysing the movement of people from Kerala to the north-western part of the subcontinent. For the same, the figure of 'Paradesi' (foreigner), the migrant from Malabar, Kerala, who travelled to Pakistan during the years that immediately preceded and followed the bifurcation in search of economic opportunities, is analysed. The hardening of borders that followed Partition resulted in these people finding it difficult to return to their 'home'land after being forced to obtain Pakistani citizenship. Partition complicated their sense of belonging and made them a 'Paradesi' in their own homeland, denying their right to citizenship. Caught between the faultlines of the neighbouring countries, these migrants find themselves in a political no-man's land, on their return to Kerala in their twilight years. The primary focus of the chapter is to locate 'Paradesi' as a political subjectivity formed during Partition and explore how this identity is in constant negotiation with the region's 'exceptional' communitarian society.

Through a series of personal interviews with these return migrants from Pakistan and a textual analysis of the filmic representation of their lives, the chapter anchors the contemporary

debates on citizenship around the figure of ‘Paradesi.’ The chapter ventures to make sense of the displacement of ‘Paradesi’ and the ways in which their case is reflected in the Kerala public sphere as a central trope in the vernacular understanding of Partition. It also attempts to unravel a new history of Partition in its sub national contexts by analysing the ‘Paradesi’ figures not as an anomaly but as a significant part in the histories of migration and communal negotiations within the “exceptional” secular domain of Kerala. The cinematic representation of the figure is explored in order to understand how the discussions on ‘Paradesi’ have been located in a humanitarian realm in the context of Kerala.

The chapter also addresses the question of citizenship in the historical context of Partition, especially for the minoritised Muslim subject. Representation and discussions of these ‘Paradesi’ figures in the public sphere, in many ways, mark and validate the nationalist tendencies of minoritising and othering the Muslim subject. While contextualising these experiences in Kerala’s ‘exceptional’ realm, the chapter explores how the ideas of Partition remain communalised even in Kerala’s ‘communitarian’ public discourse. The attempt is to understand how the nationalist histories of Partition and the othering of Muslims have figured in the constitution of communities in its sub-national contexts. In the process, the chapter briefly discusses how Partition and the resultant national borders have produced numerous refugees and how they continue to shape the ideas of citizenship in India. It also prods on the migratory politics engendered by Partition and how the movement of refugees across the national borders contests and contradicts the nationalist conceptions of borders as well as the citizens who live within those borders.

The implications of Partition as a historical process extend beyond its physical manifestations of boundaries and violence. Partition’s role in structuring and manifestations of communities in its distant contexts is taken into consideration in the present study. The way

communities negotiate with the experience and ideas of Partition and how these communities are conceived and articulated in the Partition narratives are interesting paradigms not only to analyse Partition in its (sub)national contexts but also to (re)narrate the stories of communities and inter-community relations in various regions. Moreover, the study of Partition narratives in Kerala is inextricably contingent upon the region's experience of modernity and its 'exceptional' structuring of communities. Thus, by engaging with the narratives of Partition in Malayalam, the study tries to mark these narratives as contexts to look at the nationalist discourse, figuring of community identities, community configurations and community politics within Kerala. Thus, the study unravels and understands complex processes like Partition, which shape community formations and community identities in the global south. It will also enable us to look at Islam and Muslim identity in its geopolitical specificities.

Though the study engages with the questions pertaining to the region of Kerala, it does not attempt a theorisation of the region. Instead, it puts forward the arguments that can be further developed to direct us to the conceptual categories regarding the sub-national regions and their relationship with the nation. In the present study, experiences of Partition that the region encounters become the basis for a similar exercise. The pertinent question the study explores is regarding the possibility of imagination of Partition within a specific regional context and the feasibility of nation as an obvious reference point in the process. The study entails questions that address the working of the 'region' within the logic of the nation as a conforming or contesting entity.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding Partition as a Process

The study of Partition narratives in Malayalam necessitates an identification of the dominant tropes through which the event has been hitherto unfolded. While foregrounding this catastrophic moment as a historical process, the present chapter explores the history of nationhood, communal politics, and religious identities around Partition. It traces the Partition historiography and identifies nation as one of the major tropes in these narratives. In addition, the reiterated question of religion as the only form of community to be invoked around the theme of Partition is revisited by analysing other possible forms of social imaginaries that can be identified in these narratives. The central focus of this chapter is the way these alternate imaginings of collectives negotiated with the dominant national community and how historical processes like Partition become concrete contexts for the reiterations of the nation.

The recounting of the narratives of Partition being attempted in this chapter tries to make sense of the event from various vantage points. The works of Gyanendra Pandey (1991, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2002), Urvashi Bhutalia (1998, 2015), Ayesha Jalal (1985, 2013), Mushirul Hasan (1998, 2000), Faisal Devji (1992, 2013), Rita Kothari (2011) Venkat Dhulipala (2015) are analysed to delineate the meanings these authors have imparted to the repertoire of Partition studies. While tracing the divergent histories of Partition, the first section of the chapter scrutinises the various tropes associated with these critical engagements alongside the ways in which they engage, negotiate, and understand the question of a national community. An evaluation of these narratives helps one to identify a few palpable gaps left behind by these formulations on Partition. In doing so, the chapter also problematises Partition as a north India-centric event, thereby explaining the rationale for bringing southern regions like Kerala into the narratives of Partition.

A discussion of these narratives from divergent vantage positions entails the positioning of Partition as a defining intervention in the history of nation and inter-communal relations. The second part of the chapter foregrounds Partition as a historical process that has continued to impart meanings in the nation's political, social, and religious lives by contesting the political determinism around the event. The attempt is to place Partition in the theoretical understandings of historical processes considered instrumental in identity formations and social relations. It will direct us to the ways in which the past and its memories become formative in the possible imaginations of collectives and their politics in similar contexts, albeit with specific differences.

I. Recounting Partition

Making sense of Partition and its impact has remained an arduous task owing to its spectral presence imparting distinct meanings to everyday life in the subcontinent. As a result, numerous narratives metamorphosing into a vast corpus of literature, which construed the meanings of Partition from multiple locations, emerged. In these narratives, the history around Partition is explored through various thematic paradigms that are identified as the significant tropes, which together constitute the Partition historiography.

Nationalist historiography of Partition and its Discontents

Imagined constructions of the nation's past have been central in awakening a national consciousness (Anderson 1991). In India, similar to other postcolonial countries, nation-building has been fostered and validated through a careful construction of nationalist histories (Guichard 2013). The conventional historiographical practices of the state focus on building the nation's past as it is imagined to be and as part of this process, the nationalist historiography in India underwent considerable transformations (Guichard 2013, 70). However, the episodes

of social conflicts are often interpreted in all historiographical endeavours according to the political interest of the corresponding state regime (Kumar 1996).

The nationalist historiography draws heavily from the Orientalist writings on the past, constructing a common past for the entire nation in the process. In such writings, India's pre-modern past, highlighted in the Vedic inscriptions, is used to foster an idea of nationalism and to write the nation's biography (Thapar 2014). The nation's legitimacy for the present is established where the social and cultural identities in the past were invariably in interface with the present (Thapar 2014, 169). The manner in which the present uses the past as part of political ideologies or to claim legitimacy and inheritance, can be identified in the ways in which Partition has been incorporated or omitted in the nation's biography (Pandey 2001). The nationalist interpretations of Partition seem to be evidently informed by the communal perception of Indian history where Hindus and Muslims are seen only as religious groups invariably antagonistic to each other (Pandey 2001, 4).

Nevertheless, the 'liberal' historians, predominantly the followers of Marxist historiography, shared a secular understanding of the idea of India and its past. They often contested the conception of Hindus and Muslims as two different antagonistic categories as interpreted in the historical analysis of communalism in India (Thapar 1989; Chandra 2007). While tracing the trajectory of the journey of a pre-modern society into nationhood, they attempted to centre the nationalist history in India on the struggles for Independence and the consequent attainment of freedom and nationhood (Pandey 1991, 560). Partition, being a reminder of the unprecedented violence and anarchy that "accompanied" the accomplishment of this freedom, is often sidelined in these narratives that are otherwise stories of political triumph resulting in the birth, and later progress of the nation (560). For the nationalist

historian, it is the political claims around Partition that demanded much attention.²³ It has been appraised as the consequence of the agreements and disagreements among Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru; and of the burgeoning differences between the Indian National Congress (henceforth Congress) and the All India Muslim League. In the nationalist historiography of Pakistan, the experiences during Partition have often been sidelined in the glorious struggle for the attainment of nationhood (Jaffrelot 2002, 7). For Pakistan, though Partition is undoubtedly a central moment in its history as a nation, the traditional historiography has been hesitant to present a wholesome picture of the event that involved unforeseen instances of violence (22).

In India, the nationalist grain put forward by the Congress held the All India Muslim League and their 'separatist' politics responsible for the division of the subcontinent. This theory was contested by Ayesha Jalal, wherein she described Partition as a 'bargaining chip' and tried to understand how a new nation came into being through a series of complex and protracted events (1985). According to her, "It was Congress that insisted on Partition. It was Jinnah who was against Partition" (1985, 262). However, Jalal's study of the movement for Pakistan, based on the high politics and tall figures of the time, obscures certain crucial elements to be analysed in the movement for Pakistan. Jalal's propositions, with Jinnah as the anchoring point, miss out on the critical ways in which India's high politics and everyday life at that time were intimately related to other constituents, regional strains, and various mobilisation techniques (Hasan 1985, 256).

Hence, the nationalist history eludes the scope of particularistic identities in the narratives of Partition, thereby limiting its ramifications to a particular political conjuncture in 1947. It concludes on its significance as the subcontinent's geographical bifurcation which is the widely

²³For further elaboration of this point, see Seervai (1989) and Aziz (1983). Seervai's account discusses the role plays and interventions of the political figures like Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah, and their aspirations which led to the division of the subcontinent. It makes use of the narratives from *Transfer of Power* (1979), which contains official documents of the period, edited and produced by Nicholas Mansergh, appointed by the British government; *India wins Freedom* (1988) by Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad, President of Indian National Congress, 1940-1945; *Eight lives* by Rajmohan Gandhi (1986).

circulated history of Partition through public institutions like textbooks (Kumar 1996). As a result, the dominant historians are often critiqued for ‘remaining silent’ on the everyday experiences of people, irrespective of caste-class-religious markers who lived through it (Pandey 1994). Nationalist historiography often assessed the magnitude of the event employing its political motivations and governing conveniences as the yardsticks of reasoning. In its cause-effect framework, neither the perceptions nor the suffering of the population found an expression. In its essentialised narratives on nationhood, the history of Partition is either assimilated to the trajectory of the Indian nation-state or to the histories of the British Empire in India (Pandey 1994, 190). Thus, the Movement for Pakistan, which completely changed lives and the very map of the subcontinent, has been sidelined. According to Pandey, it is often portrayed as the “other of genuine nationalism,” as the moment when the “political consciousness went wrong,” and is “painted in negative colours” (1994, 210). Thus, the story of Partition is downplayed and suppressed, and centrality is often given to the freedom struggle, as the former is seen as a black spot in the glorious account of the nation’s fight for sovereignty.

The experiential realm, with its categorical tropes of displacement and violence, can be identified as the most significant arenas omitted by the nationalist historian. However, in response to this approach adopted by the nationalist history, there emerged a revisionist perspective towards Partition. These latter narratives on Partition have deviated from the nationalist accounts. The 1990s witnessed a paradigm shift in academic scholarship on the violent days of 1947. It has attempted to revisit and scrutinise the history of Partition with regard to the contestations faced by the Indian nation-state from diverse locations. Gyanendra Pandey has effectively captured this transition as he proposes a definition of two versions – two kinds of history – of the partition of India in 1947:

Whereas historians’ history seems to suggest that what Partition amounted to was, in the main, a new constitutional/political arrangement, which did not deeply affect the central structures of Indian society or the broad contours of its history, the survivors’ account would appear to say that it

amounted to a sundering, a whole new beginning, and, thus, a radical reconstitution of community and history (Pandey 2001, 7).

According to Pandey, nationalist history is concerned with the motive of creating the truth of an event and denying it eventfulness, and he ponders over how “this other history” should be written (2001, 7). Similar questions are raised by several commentators on the extraordinary violence that accompanied the constitution of nations of India and Pakistan, as observed in the works of Urvashi Butalia (1998), Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (1993, 1998) and Veena Das (1990) among others, focusing on the trauma of Partition. These academic pursuits have unravelled a complex picture of the events and the human misery that we sum up under the rubric of ‘Partition.’

Communities, Violence, and Partition

An incapability to capture the enormity of violence is one of the severe criticisms raised against the nationalist histories of Partition (Pandey 1994; Butalia 1998; Das 2007). There is an official silence from the governments of India and Pakistan to endorse the violent history of Partition to the moment of their attained freedom as it marked a deviation from its otherwise natural and teleological course of progress (Pandey 1994). Apart from this historiographical subduing, there has been a conscious erasure of these violent acts from the public memory as both the victims and the perpetrators formed the nation.²⁴ However, the horrors of violence that constituted Partition made imprints on the collective memories of the newly formed nations. While the survivors’ accounts fuelled such recollections, the literary arena stimulated by the violence of such a magnitude resulted in the representations of Partition violence even in its distant contexts.²⁵

²⁴This observation is made in detail by Urvashi Butalia where she reflects on the absence of national memorials for Partition as remembering has seen as contentious and more complex (2015).

²⁵Chapter 3 of the dissertation contains a detailed discussion on the fictional representation of Partition violence.

As discussed previously, the historiographical representation of the violence during Partition in the official narrative of the nation has always been elusive. In the nationalist statements, mass violence and sectarian strife are seen to pose major challenges to the desired unity of the country (Pandey 2001). In such a discourse, violence is always ‘out there’. Furthermore, the statist histories make use of those violent moments in our history to create a sharp distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Other’ (Pandey 2001, 177). Violence has always been the acts of the ‘Other’ and hence, it belongs to the history of the ‘Other.’ This historiographical agenda has been set in a narrowly defined and pre-determined nationalism that failed to accommodate the violent moments in the history of the nation. In the official histories, violence often gets presented as the ‘madness’ that overtook larger sections of the population. For Pandey, in the historian’s history, everything in non-conformity with the state is labelled as the ‘Other’ (Pandey 1994, 219). Thus, it creates a “prose of otherness” in its account of mass sectarian violence, as violence represents the moments of aberrations in the course of a nation’s history (219). In his “In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today” (1991), Gyanendra Pandey talks about those moments of ‘aberrations’ in the course of our modern progressive history. According to him:

The history of violence is written up in the historiography of modern India as the history of aberration and absence. *Aberration* in the sense that violence is treated as something removed from the general run of Indian history, its distorted form, its exceptional moment: not the ‘real’ history of India at all. *Absence*—and here the point applies more emphatically to a field wider than Indian history—because historical discourse has experienced very great difficulty in capturing and re-presenting the moment of violence. The ‘history’ of violence is, therefore, almost always about context—about everything that happens around violence (559).

Rather than exploring the significance of such acts of violence in constituting the nations, it is often generalised as an instance of communal violence or sectarian strife. Such historical narratives miss out on the undeniable relation between violence and communities while masquerading it as deviant. One of the significant omissions in the nationalist historiography

of Partition in India is that it often describes the event as a story of ‘victimhood’ or as a moment of irrationality (Pandey 1994). According to Pandey, the official history in India, which draws upon the methods of colonial historiography has often incorporated the stories of violence into the history of the ‘Other’ by conceiving it as aberrational or irrational (Pandey 1994, 195). However, it would be impossible not to agree with Pandey in his observation which marks the massive violence that “surrounded or accompanied or constituted” Partition as “the most obvious sign” of the event (195).

Faisal Devji (2009), in his analysis of the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008, talks about how India has often refrained from politicising its histories of violence. He says:

Whatever the case, both India’s enmity with Pakistan in the international arena, and the mutual enmity of Hindus and Muslims in the domestic one, are based on a politics of intimacy in which each is seen as being all too familiar with the other. Because of its very closeness, such a relationship can result in the kind of violence born from the feeling of a fraternity betrayed, as much as it can lead to the amity of a brotherhood restored (2009).

Devji considers tolerance of this level as a tendency to normalise and trivialise violence as they are denied the importance of being part of the nation’s official histories (2009). One can also observe how such an approach led to the increased and frighteningly normalised violence towards Dalits and minority communities even in contemporary times (Pai and Kumar 2018).

As Pandey has rightly argued, the studies on violence have highlighted the trope of communities in the histories of Partition (1997, 2037). They elaborated how the concerns of various communities got translated into contrasting forms of hate and fear, finally resulting in violence of such a massive scale (2038). Unlike the official narratives which often employed the accounts of violence to stigmatise minor communities and their mobilisations and politics by otherising such instances, the theme of violence in these studies has brought the question of experience to the centre of Partition historiography.

Furthermore, the studies on the aftermath of violence have opened up possibilities of interpreting its impact in refashioning the communities after such events (Pandey 1997; Das 1990). It has interpreted the event in its physical manifestations fostering a north India-centric manifestation of Partition, which is contingent on its physical locations. Nevertheless, they also shed light on its presence beyond geographical contingencies by unravelling how such happenings at a national level can be experienced in local contexts and vice versa (Amin 1995, 51; Pandey 2002, 136). Such re-imaginings of the socio-political significance of violence in multiple levels foregrounds the intersectional realms of the nation and the region (Mehta 2006). In this way, it can be argued that while the locationality of violence often confines Partition discussions to the northern regions of India, its enormity triggers responses even in distant areas like Kerala, where the present study is anchored.

Women and the ‘Other Side’ of Partition

Apart from addressing the question of violence, which the nationalist historians had systematically muted, later studies carried the responsibility of providing a voice to other significant ‘silences’ in Partition narratives. The attempt was to bring forth the ‘other side’ of Partition: the human dimensions that were hitherto overlooked in the nationalist narratives. A commendable step in this direction was taken by Urvashi Butalia in her effort to historicise the experiences of women and children during Partition (1998). A series of interventions by Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (1993; 1998) and Veena Das (1990) have followed Butalia to retrieve women and their experiences from the forgotten sites of Partition history. Conceptualising a ‘perspective from the margin,’ Menon and Bhasin observe:

The story of 1947, while being one of the attainments of independence, is also a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and wide-spread communal violence, and of the realignment of family, community and national identities as a people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed (1993, WS-2).

In addition to the previously discussed limitations of remaining exclusive of the trope of violence, another significant criticism raised against the nationalist historiography is that it is patriarchal like all other disciplines. It has marginalised women and omitted the gendered nature of violence that women had encountered during Partition both within the family and from the 'other.' Most often, the cruelty against women became a retaliatory measure for the assertion of identity and the humiliation of the 'rival' community (Menon and Bhasin 1993, WS-3).²⁶ The feminist historians looked at the event through the particular ways in which women experienced it. Many women on both sides of the newly formed borders were abducted, raped, and forced to convert (Butalia 1998, 3). Some were forced into marriage, and later into what the two nation-states defined as their ideal 'home' (1998, 114). By addressing the resounding silence surrounding the question of women in Partition, Butalia brought forward questions of women's honour and its relationship with family, community, and nation at a critical point in nation-building. Thus, new interventions took place within the historiography of Partition through the framework of experience, where the centrality of women's experiences in the long process of nation-building was given its due importance.

The significance of such attempts lies not only in the way it added new dimensions to the historiography of Partition, but also in understanding the violent beginnings of the postcolonial nation. Foregrounding women's experiences during Partition enables us to speculate about how those fixed and defining characteristics of identity–community, religion and nationality—are impinged on women's lives (Menon and Bhasin 1993, WS-2). The gendered experiences around the Inter Dominion Treaty²⁷ demonstrated how the vocabulary of recovery,

²⁶Menon and Bhasin argue that the violence against women was simultaneously an assertion of identity and humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women (1993).

²⁷On December 6, 1947, India and Pakistan agreed on 'recovering' those women who had been abducted and 'rehabilitating' them in their 'native' places. The agreement between the two nations was known as the Inter Dominion Treaty, which was later enacted as an act in the parliament. The terms of the treaty were clear: women on both sides of the border who had been abducted were to be forcibly recovered and restored to their families. For further details, see, Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998).

rehabilitation, and homeland had become a euphemism for returning Sikh and Hindu women to Sikh and Hindu households, respectively (WS-2). Their efforts necessitated a renegotiation with the idea of a nation. Feminist historiography around Partition has argued that the patriarchal construction of the identity of the abducted women, which determined the entire recovery operation, raises serious questions about the Indian state's definition of itself as secular and democratic (Menon and Bhasin 1994, WS-3). They also argued that "the state, in its articulation of gender identity, implicitly and explicitly departed from its neutrality in assigning values to the "legitimate" family and community "honour" and that it did so through a regulation of women's sexuality" (Menon and Bhasin 1994, WS-3). Thus, by inflecting the category of gender into the study of Partition, a new vantage point emerged that problematised the 'natural' entity of nation from its fringes.

In addition to the challenges put forward before the nation-state, these subjective experiences of women have resonated with the 'never-endingness' of Partition: the idea of Partition as a continuing process. The notion of returning to their 'nation'—one that created the fear of a second dislocation, the repetition of the trauma, and a lingering sense of another uprooting—suggests the continuing role that Partition plays in these women's lives. The women's experiences of rape, abduction, recovery and remarriage revealed how both the patriarchal family and the nation-state become synonymous in their perceptions of women's role (Butalia 1998). The multiple patriarchies at work in women's lives within the family and community, and as embedded in social and cultural institutions of the nation-state become evident through their experiences. One of the significant arguments of Butalia is regarding the position of the postcolonial nation as an intensely contested, fragile, and vulnerable state which attempted to reclaim its lost legitimacy by reclaiming its women 'citizens' (Butalia 1998). The work also bespeaks the question of women's recovery becoming crucial to the Indian nation due to the threat of emasculation of its agency as a modern nation-state (1998). Thus, for the

self-legitimation of the state and the community, the question of gender became crucial. The dynamics of gender, as explained in these experiences, reveal multiple imaginings of the postcolonial nation and the multiple ways it is experienced, especially in the margins.

Partition, a critical context to understand the nature of gender violence in India, works as a solid framework to explore the gender dimensions of communal violence and how female identity gets defined in the national imagination. Partition led to the forging of the separate national identities of India and Pakistan, and along with them, a female identity that strictly defines the religious community and the modern nation-state. Partition studies also help to understand how women's bodies become the testimonies to understand the horrors of communal violence. The large-scale atrocities meted out towards women during the time of Partition exemplify the gendered nature of communal violence. The critical position of women in times of communal violence necessitates the continued emphasising of their multiple identities - gender, religious, and national.

Partha Chatterjee's "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" discusses the relation between nationalism and the women's question in India (1993, 118). The eighteenth-century social reform movements in India were characterised by the changes it has brought in women's lives by abolishing social evils like child marriage, and polygamy, and the encouragement of female education. The earlier novels in most of the Indian languages were named after its women protagonists projecting women as the centre of social change. However, Chatterjee identifies a decline in the importance of women's questions in the later years of the nationalist era (122). He attributes it to "the refusal of nationalism to address women's questions as part of the political negotiations with the colonial state" (128). He identifies how the women's question has been pushed beyond the borders of the nation's political realm. In contrast, the feminist historiography of Partition has elucidated the extent to which women's identities became central in defining not just the imaginary of a nation and its political

constitution based heavily on religious terms, but also how female sexuality was employed in the carving of the boundaries of India and Pakistan. As Chatterjee argues, the nationalist discourse might have been reluctant in addressing this women's question (117). Interestingly though, that has never brought the question of women out of the politics of the nation. The patriarchal nation has always been concerned with the question of female identity in defining its boundaries.

Apart from bringing the experience quotient to the centre of Partition historiography, the feminist historians have also highlighted the possibility of different stakeholders in the process. They made possible a new imagination of history that was otherwise caught in the reiterated theories of communalism and high politics of nation-building. It entails how the patriarchal notions prevalent in the family and the communities have been extended to the national imagination, mirroring one another in its treatment of women. Women's experience during Partition has blurred and thereby complicated the boundaries of communities and nations, and challenged these institutions from the margins. Thus, the marginal voices of women and other minority communities have contested the dominant history of Partition, thereby initiating novel discussions around nation and community.

Communalism, Muslim Identity, and Partition

The stigma of communalism has remained with Partition as it is constantly invoked during communal strife in India. All the descriptions of communal conflicts reminded us of the 1940s as they are often seen as the residual of Partition. Partition was invoked during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 when religious identity was a grave issue. Most often, the narratives around Partition are generalised into the essentialised tales of communalism (Jalal 1998, 3). It marks the bifurcation of regions on a religious basis where communities are perceived within the binary of majority vs. minority, and portrays the

clashes between these categories resulting from political animosity that has to remain forever (Jalal 1998, 10). However, the theme of communalism enables an interpretation of Partition as an event that happened in 1947 and continues to influence the subcontinent's political, social, and religious scenario.

Communalism has thus remained the central theme through which the Partition narratives have been analysed across historiographical practices and modes of representation. It has also remained the tangible point at which communities have been brought into these narratives. However, bringing the community question to the narratives of Partition, beyond the axiom of nationalism vs. communalism, is crucial to unravel the complexities in the dynamics with which Partition continues to affect the inter-community relations in the subcontinent. Pandey points out that the “heuristic” nature of the existing study of communalism was concerned only with encapsulating the politics, attitudes, and aspirations of the communities involved (2006, viii). Instead, the Partition studies around violence have focused on the particular historical context in which communities imagine and interact with the experiences of Partition. Beyond the comparisons at every instance of communal strife, it will mark Partition as a critical juncture in the trajectories of religious communities and their politics in both national and regional contexts, which is of particular interest to the present study.

It is essential to look at the refashioning of community and its manifestations of being ‘communal’ in the particular context of India to understand the figuring of community and communal histories in processes like Partition. Gyanendra Pandey, in one of the significant enquiries into the trajectories of communalism in India (2006), negates the general notion of the term as religious extremism as it is “obfuscating” and argues that “the term, the politics, the attitudes it seeks to encapsulate have a history” and “the boundaries separating these from other attitudes and politics” are not clear as it has been generally understood (2006, viii). Thus, such notions have placed communalism within the particular historical and political juncture

rather than the mere interpretation as religious animosity. Another significant element in the academic scholarship on communal histories that the present study also incorporates is the participants' understanding of the particular process. Pandey argues that "along with the 'actual' historical experience of the people—i.e., the social, economic, and political struggles in which they were involved and which relate to the question of Hindu and Muslim politics,"—it is important to consider the meanings the different participants impart to these experiences (viii). Such an attempt helps delineate the multiple voices during communal violence and contest the monolithic interpretations of such histories and the participants. When employed in the study of Partition, this approach will enable multiple interpretations of its history concerning the specific socio-political contexts.

In the Indian context, the colonial obsession with cataloguing and enumerating the people according to caste and religion often ignited their caste consciousness and religious pride (Pandey 2006). However, the studies on communalism does not elide the existence of community identity in the pre-colonial era (Thapar 1989). On the contrary, they analyse and foreground the thickening of such identity consciousness after the foreign domination (Thapar 1989, 223). In such a scenario, Partition officially marked the mode of organising a collective based on religion, neglecting the regional strains within those religious categories. Mushirul Hasan suggests,

A common refrain in popular and scholarly writing was that the country's division was a colossal tragedy, a man-made catastrophe brought about by hot-headed and cynical politicians who failed to grasp the implications of division along religious lines (1998, 2662).

Moreover, the recent interpretations of the phenomena of communalism in India have advanced an institutionalised form of 'everyday' communalism, which is predominantly region-centred (Pai and Kumar 2018). This trend has largely been a result of the strengthened ideological base of Hindutva after the electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) consecutively in 2014 and 2019. Their anti-Muslim propaganda has resulted in imparting political legitimacy to

everyday conflicts, often translated as Hindu-Muslim confrontations (Pai and Kumar 2018). The widening electoral success of the BJP and a broader Hindu consolidation has led to the strengthening of anti-Muslim propaganda and the normalisation of anti-Muslim violence.²⁸ In such a scenario, the 1940s are being constantly invoked as part of this propaganda wherein Partition becomes the historical justification for the othering of Muslim community in the country.

The radicalisation of history encourages the need to diverge from the conventional theorisations of Partition which failed to free itself from the problematic of communalism. In the earlier studies, it seems that in a state-centred drive to homogenise religious categories, Hindus and Muslims are considered unified groups, regardless of regional, linguistic, cultural, and class variations (Jalal 1996). Partition's impacts are identified in the status of these communities within the nation-state, where some of them became full citizens, and others became populations to be governed by the nation-state (Pandey 1999, 11). Thus, Partition becomes an experience through which the nation gets reiterated through the binaries of Secularism/Communalism or Hindu/Muslim. It also configured the communities in a particular manner where the Muslim population is perceived as 'communal' with doubtful loyalties (Devji 1992, 8). As violence was perceived to be outside the modern, secular space of the nation, the communal became culpable of the unimaginable magnitude of violence unleashed into the life of the subcontinent as it is seen during Partition. What happened in the official histories of nation-building is the marginalisation of communal strife and the stigmatising of the Muslim figure (14). His identity is problematised in the 'secular' struggles of the period. However, during the last decade, debates around Partition were extended by exploring the regional and class dimensions of such communal categories and their politics (Jalal 1996, 682).

²⁸In the election campaigns of Narendra Modi (in 2014 and more explicitly in 2019), the status of Muslims remained a constant figure, inflected with the burden of Partition, in his invocations of a Hindu nation. For a detailed discussion on this, see Gilmartin, 2015.

The ‘secular’ strains in the Indian historiography, as mentioned before, have been critiqued for not considering the prospect of “Muslim communalism as an ideological construction of the politics of secular nationalism” (1996, 683). The idea of ‘separatist’ Muslim has perpetuated the histories of an event that casts its shadow over various aspects of state and society in India. Nevertheless, these theorisations seem to be in a self-chosen amnesia, where it forces itself to forget that there were “powerful ‘secular’ strains within Muslim Politics” (683). They have been critiqued for failing to unpack the notion of an all-India Muslim communalism to create analytical space for the conflicting regional strands in Muslim politics. The intensity of emotions involved had more to do with various social classes’ political and economic anxieties than a profound urge to create a Muslim/Islamic state (Hasan 1998, 2665). These approaches were reluctant in analysing “why and how different forms of identities and consciousness got translated into a powerful campaign for a separate Muslim homeland, why partition created 10 million refugees, led to the death of over a million people, and resulted in sexual savagery, including the rape and abduction of 75,000 women” (2663). Hasan talks about a neglected reality in which Partition refers to a point in history when many were pushed into taking religious positions driven by the fear of death (2663).

However, the monolithic conception of religious communities, which is intensified further in the conceptions of Partition, is highly contested. Against the essentialised reading of an Indian Muslim identity, various schisms within the community are highlighted owing to their caste, class, locale affiliations (A. Alam 2008; 2009; 2011).²⁹ This vantage point foregrounds the importance of contextualising the Muslim community to understand the multi-layered experiences of being a Muslim in the Indian subcontinent. It also helps to understand the community and its boundaries in constant flux depending on the changing historical

²⁹A. Alam has explored various schisms or sects within the Muslim communities in India, particularly in his works on the Madrasas in north India (A. Alam 2008; 2009; 2011). His argument against the vilification of Muslims as the collective ‘Other’ is based on an analysis of various sects within the community and the way they perceive and contest one another.

contexts. Moreover, communities exist in a continuum of renegotiations with the nation-state where they can be translated into a cluster of tendencies (J. Alam 2008, 46). Partition marked a reconstitution of religious communities in the subcontinent. However, their heterogeneous peculiarities can be understood only in the light of multiple social and political contexts like that of Kerala with particular historical and ideological circumstances.

The “political apologetics” that conceived Partition as a moment of departure from the nation’s golden ideals of secularism assigned Indian Muslims with the historical burden of Pakistan and the growing religious antagonism (Palakeel 2011, 329). Devji suggests that the ideal of Indian nationalism, which is centered on the binary of Hindu/Muslim, is often problematised around the memory of Partition and the figure of Muslim (1992, 3). Often the Muslim is portrayed as the perpetrator of the ‘otherised’ actions that lead to such calamities (4). The stigmatisation and marginalisation experienced by Muslims since Partition amount to how they have been considered the reason for the communal politics of Partition. The articulations of political demands among Muslims have often been intuited as a warning for another Pakistan. The Sachar Committee Report (2006),³⁰ an inquiry into the social, economic, and educational conditions of the Muslims in India, has revealed their marginalised position within the country. It has reported six decades of institutional neglect and bias faced by the community since Partition. The report also states Partition as one of the root causes behind the marginalisation of Muslims and urges the need to consider the backwardness of Muslims as a national problem.

Among the multiple meanings through which Partition continues to live among us, its political salience has a considerable impact on the life and experiences of the Muslim communities in Independent India. They face discrimination owing to the alleged disloyalty

³⁰The Rajinder Sachar Committee, appointed in 2005, was commissioned to prepare a report on the latest social, economic and educational condition of Indian Muslims. The committee had highlighted and presented its suggestions and solutions for the development of Indian Muslims. The report is the first of its kind, revealing the backwardness of Indian Muslims (Sachar 2006).

that Partition's political history has implicated on them, which has been of great scholarly concern. The studies of Muslim communities in India highlighted the 'fragile and contested' nature of their status as citizens (J. Alam 2008; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Sherman 2016). Muslim communities in India have participated in the nation's collective life often by reconciling their religious differences while focusing on new ways to define their sense of belonging in post-Partition India. Taylor Sherman, in her work, *Muslim belonging in Secular India* (2016), traces the Muslim contribution to the collective life of Hyderabad by showing how the community is merged into the region's local culture. According to her,

these different communities are, naturally, embedded in their particular social milieux. Their lives are hewn by local and regional structures and processes, and for this reason their stories are often told in the form of regional and urban histories. At the same time, these communities are not isolated from translocal currents and global impulses. Indeed, the interplay between these different scales of identification has added depth and complexity to Muslim lives and Muslim belonging in India (7).

Even during the pre-Partition days, there were deliberate attempts to foreground 'composite' national identity owing to the anticipated fear of the discrimination of the Muslim minority in a country with a considerable Hindu majority. An intellectual circle at the Jamia Millia Islamia (the National Muslim University) strived for a composite national culture that claimed Muslims' right to be recognised as unhyphenated Indians (Gautier 2019). They argued for the inclusive nature of the developing nation-state though later to be neglected by the Nehru government.³¹

³¹Laurence Gautier studies the role of this Jamia group consisting of teachers and students in bringing about a 'composite' national culture through academic experiments. Gautier observes that their efforts were not encouraged by the Nehruvian government despite Nehru being the chief spokesman of secularism in the country. Paradoxically, Nehru's choice to reach out to Muslim citizens and promote national integration was the Aligarh Muslim University, surprisingly, often considered the 'cradle' of 'Muslim separatism.' In light of these paradoxical choices made by Nehru and the complex relations between Jamia and the Nehru government, Gautier highlights some of Nehru's ambiguities towards Muslim representation in secular India which formed the fundamental character of Indian secularism to date.

However, the attempt here is not to present Muslims as the only community to be deeply impacted by Partition, or the subcontinent's bifurcation as the only reason for the alienation faced by Muslim communities in India. The postcolonial state has initiated violent intrusions into the life of communities across the geographical landscape of India, as it is in the case of the accession of Hyderabad in 1948 or the displacement of Meos of Mewar post Partition.³² Rita Kothari has worked extensively on the predicament of the Sindhi community in a post-Partition scenario. The community's troubled sense of belonging, according to her, has been the sign of the "persistence of Partition" (Kothari 2011). Contesting the monolithic imagination of Muslims in India as a single category, communities like Sindhi Muslims, Meos and Mappilas assert the distinctive nature of the history of their origins and the course of their evolution. However, the manner in which the Muslim communities' belongingness to India has been continuously suspected as an unaccomplished one and the consequent state of unsettlement inflicted on them is one of the main ways in which the 'persistence' of Partition has been understood.

The Muslim communities in India have redefined their status in terms of inter-community networking and political negotiations with the governments to assert their position in the postcolonial state. There are assertive stories that advocate a shared national culture demanding a space for the community. The example of the Muslims in the Old City of Hyderabad district, Telangana, substantiates how 'civic conduct' and everyday expressions of active civic engagements have been employed to contest the historical alienation and political negligence meted out towards them since 1947 (McLaughlin 2017). Through such quotidian norms of civility and social conduct, they explicitly mark their presence in the city's social life foregrounding their sense of belonging and citizenship rights in the postcolonial nation (McLaughlin 2017). Such renegotiations in public life and political strategies adopted by the

³²For a detailed discussion on the theme see, Akhtar (2013).

Muslim communities indicate their vulnerable condition in post-Partition India.³³ It is one of the paradigms to be analysed in the present study that engages with the Muslim community in Kerala and their socio-political significance in the region.

The positioning of Muslims as a minority community within India, a secular nation with a Hindu majority, has entailed critical discussions on the themes of their sense of belonging in relation to the ideas of nation, citizenship, and secularism. At the same time, owing to the critical importance given to the region South Asia in the study of Muslim communities, similar attempts have been made to analyse the inter-community negotiations between Muslims and other communities. An analysis of the representations of Muslim minority belonging in Nepal reveals an “underlying narrative where the Muslims are perceived either to be the cooperative supporter of the dominant cultures or as disloyal communalists who form a threat to the integrity of the nation” (Sijapati 2017, 201). Such representations of the figure of Muslims consider only the limited realities of these communities, eliding their internal peculiarities.

The section attempted to map the divergent narratives around Partition which addressed diverse concerns from various vantage points. Owing to the limited scope of the present project, only selected works from the vast repertoire of Partition have been included as part of this discussion. However, they have attempted to unravel the complexities of an event that has resonance even in contemporary times by incorporating multiple marginal positions that problematised the experiences of Partition in ways the dominant histories could seldom attempt. The overview of the Partition historiography attempted above reveals its moorings in the nationalist traditions in the immediate years of post-independent India. However, during the revisionist turn in Indian historiography, the paradigm shift in understanding what constitutes the ‘political’ has also significantly shaped the concerns of Partition historiography.

³³Gayer and Jaffrelot have studied the predicament of Indian Muslims as a marginalised community owing to their ‘troubled legacy’ by analysing the socio-economic and political conditions of Muslims in various Indian cities. They have tried to trace the social insecurity and spatial segregation experienced by Muslims to the Partition (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 1-22).

The experience quotient has problematised the nation through the tropes of violence, women, and significantly the Muslim question. In light of the above discussion, the present study attempts to expand the theoretical frameworks which have hitherto restrained Partition to the geographies of north India to understand its ramifications in the regional context of Kerala.

II. Partition as a Process

The repertoire of Partition historiography discussed briefly in the above section substantiates the frequent reappearance of Partition in India's political, religious, and social lives and the reverberations it created the academic discourses. The meanings imparted by Partition and the corresponding identity formations and political undercurrents foretell its ubiquitous influence in the subcontinent. The contemporary political climate in the country has witnessed repeated invocations of Pakistan—the country that owes its existence to the Partition—thereby reminding us of the turbulent times. Pakistan has often been associated with what India has been hesitant to endorse.³⁴ In the self-definition of being a nation in Indian context, even after seventy years of Independence, Pakistan continues to play the role of this 'non- secular', 'intolerant' other. The definition of Indian nation-state as a nation with superior civilisational credentials, as highlighted by the Congress, involved the rejection of the idea of Pakistan: a nation constituted primarily by religion (Chandra 2007). These repeated appearances of Pakistan in India's political, religious, and social lives call for a historical understanding of the idea of Pakistan.

Scholars have attempted to trace the historical evolution of Pakistan as a nation that changed the course of India's freedom struggle and resulted in the postcolonial state that has

³⁴Giriraj Singh, currently the Indian Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, said that those who oppose Narendra Modi should go to Pakistan as they have no place in India during a poll meeting at Deogarh on 18 April 2014 (*Times of India*, 20 April 2014). On 21 May 2015, the present Indian Minister for Minority Affairs, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said that all those who wanted to eat beef could go to Pakistan while advocating a ban on cow slaughter. (*The Hindustan Times*, 22 May 2015).

become in/famous for its internal and external political relationships. These studies are predominantly centred on the theory of ‘insufficiency of imagination in evaluating the process of nation-building in Pakistan.’³⁵ Scholars argue how Pakistan has been conceived during the political emergencies of the final years of colonialism in order to silence the insecurities of Indian Muslims.

Pakistan, by all accounts, seems to have happened in a fit of collective South Asian absent-mindedness, the tragic end result of the ‘transfer of power’ negotiations gone awry, hastily midwived by a cynical, war weary Britain anxious to get out of the morass of an imploding empire, leaving the unsuspecting millions to face its brutal consequences (Dhulipala 2015, 7).

It was employed as a ‘bargaining chip’ by Jinnah, as Jalal observes it, to ensure Muslims’ participation in an overwhelmingly Hindu India in construction (1985, 57). The failure to become a stable nation due to the lack of a coherent national identity for Pakistan is often historically traced to the insufficient imagining of its nationhood (Cohen 2004). Though proposed as the homeland for Muslims, Pakistan couldn’t anchor its identity solely on the religious marker of being Muslim, and the country is often identified to be the example for a ‘nationalism without a nation’ (Jaffrelot 2002).³⁶

However, there have been attempts to understand the idea of Pakistan against the theory of its lack of imagination (Dhulipala 2015). Following the debates around the Two-nation Theory and Partition, Dhulipala argues for the conception of Pakistan as sufficiently articulated and popularly debated. Tracing the idea from its inception through its dissemination, he analyses “how Pakistan was developed and debated in the public sphere and how popular enthusiasm was generated for its successful achievement in the last decade of British rule in India” (2015, 4). He explores the popular underpinnings of Pakistani nationalism in the united

³⁵The phrase describing Pakistan as an ‘insufficiently imagined’ nation-state has been inspired by Salman Rushdie. (Dhulipala 2015, 3). In his novel, *Shame* (1983) which engages with the history of Pakistan as a nation, he describes the country as “a failure of the dreaming mind” (Rushdie 1995, 87).

³⁶For further details see, Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (2002).

provinces of Agra and Oudh, the regions which were not geographically partitioned.³⁷

Rejecting the presumption of an “inchoate anti-Indianism” as the “default mode” for Pakistan as a nation-state, he argues,

far from being a vague idea that that accidentally became a nation-state, Pakistan was popularly imagined in the UP as a modern Islamic State- a New Medina as some called it (2015, 8).

Dhulipala delineates the political, economic, religious, and geographical aspects of the idea of Pakistan by analysing the role played by the Deobandi *Ulema* in the articulation and popularity of the idea. Thus, Dhulipala’s work brings out the historical and political significance of Pakistan’s nationalist imagination as not just a “refuge for Indian Muslims.” Dhulipala tries to validate how the idea of Pakistan was popularised in provinces other than the north-western and the north-eastern parts of the subcontinent where it has become a physical reality.

However, Pakistan is often described as a nation-state that defied the conventional sense of the form for its geopolitical paradoxes (Devji 2013). Considering the idea of Pakistan as an expression of ‘Zionism,’ Devji presents Pakistan as a nation epitomising the religious nationalism thwarting the post-Enlightenment conception of nationhood as a secular project (45).³⁸ In Devji’s observation, it is a “political geography devoid of the historical connection of lands and people” (2013, 42). While problematising the religious origins of Pakistan, Devji identifies its deviations from the modern nations in terms of geographical infinitude.

From an Eretz Israel that can include large chunks of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, to a Pakistan that would add to its territory not simply the whole of Kashmir, but also bits of the Indian provinces of Punjab, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, these countries have never possessed a stable form even in their own imaginations (22).

³⁷Provinces in north India, which currently form the parts of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

³⁸Zionism is the Jewish nationalist movement that idealises the establishment of a Jewish nation-state. The ideology proposes the historical relation of the Jewish religion to the land of Palestine as the basis of a desired nationhood. Devji (2013) observes this national imagination in comparison to the idea of Pakistan as the nation for Muslims irrespective of any geographical finiteness.

This analysis of Pakistan as a nation-state discusses the process of the social imagination it involves in detail. It situates the underpinnings of national imagination in Pakistan on a religious basis in the pre-Enlightenment imagination of communities. Problematising the nationalist idea represented by Pakistan and Israel, Devji concludes on the frailty of such 'pre-modern' imagination within the modern space of the 'nation state' (2013, 224). Such frictions between the nation-state and other notions of collectives can be observed throughout the history of Indian state as observed in Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern parts of the subcontinent. However, in the post-Independent Indian state, the imagining of collective represented by Pakistan has been severely stigmatised in the light of an idea of 'Muslim separatism.' The solidarity in terms of religion, especially for the Muslim communities, is often perceived with doubtful loyalties towards the nation. An ideological construction of Indian nation-state in opposition to that of Pakistan used by the nationalist historiography and the Hindu nationalists has been continuing till today.

Similarly, post-9/11, Muslims are perceived in opposition to the enlightenment ideals of the modern nation and secularism in the global scenario. The perception is strengthened by conceptual explanations like the clash of civilisation.³⁹ The previous discussions have corroborated the impact of Partition on the politics of the subcontinent and vice versa. Its implications have been found impactful in the global politics exemplified in the widening popularity received by the framework of clash of civilisation. The interpretation of Partition as a civilisational clash between Hindus and Muslims, which reflected the impossibility of

³⁹'Clash of civilization' is a theoretical framework introduced by Samuel Huntington (1993) through which he tried to make sense of the global politics in the post-cold war scenario. According to him, the world has to be witnessing inter-civilisational conflicts anchored on cultural dissimilarities rather than ideological or economic. He identifies culture as the prime source of division even though nations remain the dominating political category. He interpreted the growing intolerance towards Islam in American and European countries as the result of faultlines in civilisations. Post-2000s, the framework received enthralling popularity, especially in the imperialist societies, to explain the treatment meted out to Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. The framework has also been strongly critiqued as it interpreted the Western world as the keepers of liberal democracy, human rights and individualism and the life world of Islam as one of the parochial ties. The framework and the popularity it received, at least from right-wing politics, show how Islam has been targeted and framed in opposition to the noble ideals of nationalism.

forming a unified nation, resulted in establishing these religious categories as contesting, independent civilisations (Eaton 2014). This interpretation has created more substantial implications in the context of Islamophobia. It has impacted the conceptions on Pakistan, which are constantly invoked throughout the subcontinent and its significance in forming religious collectives, and their politics is relevant in the present study in the specific context of Kerala.

Nation has remained the dominant political category in all these theoretical endeavours with which other social imaginaries are in ceaseless negotiations. In a post-modern scenario, nation is invoked as the most critical category. Even while engaging with other forms of social imaginaries and social markers like community, religion, and caste, the nation has stood as an essential reference point. Partition marks a significant juncture in the formation of a modern Indian nation-state and, as elaborated, has continued to affect the reconstitution of the nation across the country. The nationalist discourse in India has generated an academic scholarship on the nation-state which analysed its relevance in India through the critical lenses of post-colonialism, gender, and Dalit and other marginal discourses. As varied the categories involved in these critical discourses, the non-colonial form of nationalism in India has been characterised by ‘the fragmentary, local, and the subjugated’ (Chatterjee 1993, 121). Such a nationalist discourse, where the social whole can be made sense only through fragmented perspectives, rejects the hegemonic homogenisation within the nation-state as it is “not sufficiently capacious to unfold the differential nature of nationalist thought in India” (Guru 2011, 37). Rather than the conception of nationalist history as a neat homogenised model, the treatment of the nation’s history as a series of ‘fragments’ opens up the possibilities of including the discordant, marginal, and critical voices (Chatterjee 1993, 136). Similarly, Partition being an experience where the nation is reiterated in form and content, it is important to understand the historical nuances of that experience as “one of continuation peopled by several subjects, several consciousness” (Chatterjee 1993, 137).

The widening postcolonial dilemma with the nation-state has also revealed the multifaceted impacts of Partition, which cannot be mapped unilaterally. Reflections on the idea of freedom in the contemporary political scenario often remind us of how the horrors of Partition have gradually come to displace our idea of freedom and our annual reflections on the momentous events of August 1947 (Devji 2017). Partition, thus, continues to be a living history for the subcontinent, as evident in the form of various fissures within the nation. From the physical implications of violence to the political connotations of religious nationalism, the effects of Partition in the frontier regions like north-eastern regions and Ladakh reveal the unexplored landscapes of Partition experience. Also, the incorporations of caste-class dimensions within the experience highlight new directions to the inquiry into the Partition. Urvashi Butalia's *Partition: The Long Shadow* (2015) discusses "how inconclusive the Partition event has been, and how its ramifications persist even seven decades after" (2015, 30). She attempts a re-appraisal of Partition studies by including diverse categories like Sindhi Muslims of Gujarat, Ladakh, and the Communist Party in Kashmir. Such fragments within the Partition narratives reveal the continuing ramifications of Partition in the nation's life, often from the peripheries of the nation. Similarly, the present thesis makes an attempt to analyse how the 'fragments' in the narratives of the nation have contributed to the Partition stories by bringing in a snippet from the southernmost part of the subcontinent. By attempting to recover the distinctive histories of affect and translation of a historical experience as that of Partition, the study explores its afterlives in the regional context of Kerala.

The narratives of the nation have often employed similar historical processes in the construction of histories and identities. An "invention of tradition" has been observed as central to the national imagination, and instrumental in constructing collective memories for the nation (Said 2000, 179). He elaborated it as "a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an

entirely functional way” (179). Apropos of the Saidian argument of fabrication of the past, the memory of Partition has been constructed in myriad ways, adapting it into the different histories of the nation and the diverse contexts within. Therefore, an attempt to divulge the status of such a complex historical juncture from the specific context of Kerala becomes significant. More importantly, the vernacular experience of Partition attains significance in the discussions of Islam in Kerala. It makes possible an interpretation of the Muslim community in Kerala as the representatives of the ‘national figure of Muslim’ who have been burdened with the ‘guilt’ of Partition and its continuing effects. Said also talks about how people make use of collective memories “to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world” (2000, 179). Said discusses how the Israeli government invoked the holocaust as a way of consolidating Israeli national identity (181). Similarly, Partition has always figured in the (sub)national narratives in the Indian subcontinent, often problematising the figure of the Muslim in post-Partition India. In this regard, Partition can be considered a concurring point of divergent ideas of India, which is materialised in the modern nation-state at that point.

The chapter has explored the spectral presence of Partition in the way the nation has been reiterating its presence in postcolonial India’s physical and mental landscape. In the process, the chapter engaged with the different histories of Partition to identify the tropes associated with the event and examined how certain communities imagined, experienced, and responded during such catastrophic moments. It also engaged with the ways in which Partition marked the framing of particular communities as communal/communitarian, especially in relation to the ‘Muslim’ community in society. The chapter has also foregrounded Partition as a process and how religious communities and religious self are interpreted in the subcontinent. The chapter argues that the ‘ascendancy of history’ on the national scene and the political and social ramifications it created also expanded the impact of Partition. While the acts of remembering

such histories of social conflicts have been profoundly complex, there have been multiple and even contesting ways of imagining the process based on the different conceptions of the nation. These imaginings validate similar explorations from the nation's fringes as it is in the case of Kerala, where a regional imagination of the nation and the experience of Partition can be traced. The present study which focuses on the discussions of Partition in Kerala, also tries to understand its ramifications in the regional discourses of communities, religious identities and their negotiation with the nation-state. For the process, the following chapter explores the socio-political realm of Kerala from which the vernacular discussions of Partition developed.

CHAPTER 2

Imagining the Region: ‘Exceptionalism’ in Kerala

This study of Partition narratives in Kerala is intrinsically connected to the particular histories of communities, their encounters with modernity and political ideologies, and the region’s self-fashioning into a linguistic state. In comparison with the rest of the country, the historical trajectory of the region with its multi-religious social fabric, colonial encounters beginning from the fifteenth century and the formation of the first Communist government in India in the twentieth century, amount to the identification of Kerala as a distinct political and socio-cultural entity. The discourses around the Kerala Model of Development⁴⁰ have contributed to a unique understanding of the region and a progressive *Malayalee* identity. Such specific historical contexts of the region from which the selected histories of Partition emerge—in resonance with the developmental narratives of nation, community assertions, and their politics in the backdrop of the subcontinent’s political turmoil—validate the explorations of Partition narratives in Kerala.

The chapter, dwelling on Kerala’s socio-political scenario, analyses the projection of a solid sub-national imagination that claims a discrete communitarian⁴¹ consciousness in the region. However, rather than attempting to trace a linear history of communities and the region, the chapter tries to understand its various political manifestations in Kerala’s political milieu, which help these communities to be stakeholders in a communitarian public realm. It also seeks to analyse the discourse of Kerala’s ‘exceptionalism’ vis-a-vis other parts of the country that attributes an enlightened community consciousness for the region. The analysis involves

⁴⁰The Kerala Model of Development refers to the state’s achievement in human development indicators despite the low economic growth. Among other Indian states, Kerala boasts about high literacy, high life expectancy, low infant mortality, low birth rate, and enhanced healthcare infrastructure. For a detailed discussion, see Parayil (1996).

⁴¹Drawing on the academic literature that construes the social and political aspects of the communities in Kerala as ‘communitarian,’ the study also differentiates between ‘communal and ‘communitarian.’ In this sense, ‘communitarian’ ascribes to non-violent and tolerant ways of coexistence. For a detailed discussion, see Mammen (1981); Mathew (1989); Devika and Varghese (2010).

exploring specific socio-political and literary movements to demonstrate the disjuncture in the history and politics in Kerala that complicates this discourse of ‘exceptionalism.’ In the process, the chapter engages with the master narratives which define the ideas of community and identity, and also attempts to understand how these movements accommodate the concept of community in its national or local forms. In addition, it explores how identities were (re)defined and contextualised during these historical processes.

The initial section of the chapter briefly looks at the historical development of Kerala as a socio-political and cultural region that claims a distinctive social life to its credit. This section seeks to understand the plurality in Kerala’s claims to exceptionalism from diverse locations. In the light of these discussions, the second section of the chapter touches upon some critical instances of mass mobilisations in Kerala. The attempt is to understand the mobilising factors behind these movements and how they incorporated different community identities into their course. The discussion on these historical movements foregrounds that such community mobilisations have often invoked reformist and developmental ideologies to camouflage their ‘communal’ interests in various ways. The next section of the chapter explores community politics in the region. The unique ‘Kerala model’ is analysed with the help of pertinent frames - George Mathew (1989), James Chiriyankandath (1993), Asish Nandy (2000), Ashutosh Varshney (2002), J. Devika (2007), J Devika and V. J. Varghese (2010), and Nissim Mannathukkaren (2016) - which attempted to unravel the specific nature of community mobilisations in Kerala. The final section of the chapter looks at the Malayalam literary scene during the Progressive Literary Movement to contextualise selected literary narratives on Partition in Malayalam. It discusses the role of literature in offering a vision of ‘modern’ Kerala and explores how the literature of the selected period captured the spirit of various mobilisations. Furthermore, the ways in which (community) identities are contextualised in the

literary narratives, mirroring the social and political transformations in the region, are closely analysed.

I. Kerala and Uniqueness: A Historical Imagination

Though the modern linguistic state of Kerala was formed in 1956, the identification of the state into a distinct political entity dates back to the region's ancient imaginations, as evident in the mythical interpretations of the story of Parasurama (Narayanan 1972, 31; Veluthat 2009, 298- 302).⁴² The fashioning of Kerala's political identity during the medieval period can be traced to the Cera kingdom of Mahodayapuram (AD 800- 1100), when the political boundaries of the region were redefined, and a separate identity consciousness was produced (Veluthat 1977, 133). Veluthat disentangles how 'Kerala gets defined both as a geographical and a political unit in the ninth century' (2009, 298). During the ninth century, the power structure in the society was steered by the Brahmanical council and they instituted a new orientation in the society and prescribed a specific pattern of social evolution determined by the caste hierarchy (Veluthat 1977, 133). These Brahminical settlements are considered responsible for forming the state and its peculiar character as distinct from the rest of south India of that time (Veluthat 2009, 299). *Keralolpati*, a Malayalam narrative concerned with the history of the region's origin, historicised Kerala as a separate unit with its own territory and 'peculiar' tradition (299). Thus, Kerala's distinctive identity as a region with Brahminical values was developed in the age of Cheraman Perumal (AD 800-1124). To a great extent, Kerala's unity and identity in the later period are contingent on this earlier idea of the region (2009, 304).

⁴²In the popular Hindu myth about Kerala's origin, the land was retrieved from the sea by Parasurama, the warrior sage who is an incarnation of Vishnu. He throws his axe into the sea, and as a result, the land of Kerala arises from water. The myth is often interpreted for legitimating the Brahmanical hierarchy in the region. This account is given in the text, *Keralolpati*, as Parasurama creates the land between Kanyakumari and Gokarna for the Brahmin settlers (Veluthat 1977, 4).

The existence of other communities outside the Brahmanical fold of Hinduism has been understood as a case of cultural cohabitation necessitated by economic and social mutual dependence. Trade played a substantial part in the making of such a “syncretic society” where diverse groups maintained “symbiotic” relationships with others (Narayanan 1972, v). An absence of confrontations or conflicts is highlighted as an intrinsic feature of the “mysterious ways” in which communities are shaped in Kerala (v). In the “symbiotic” relationship, heterogeneous religio-cultural groups lived by benefiting from one another and the condescending Hindu society enabled the peaceful coexistence of these different communities (v). The fact that the formation of these diverse religio-cultural groups had more to do with mercantile operations and not conquest added to the exceptionality of their coexistence. Patronage was given to the foreign traders by the Kerala rulers owing to the trade relations and sea route access ensured by them. Thus, the exceptional character of religious tolerance was a byproduct of trade, contingent upon the dependency among different communities (Narayanan 1972, 33). The region’s geographical location by the sea route and abundant resources in terms of spices added to its uniqueness. The symbiotic environment has engendered, in an organic manner, a cultural exchange in terms of language and faith. (1972, vii). Thus, Kerala’s multicultural social fabric has been widely identified with peaceful coexistence and woven out of the association among groups for an extended period. MGS Narayanan identifies the region’s “temperamental adjustability and open-mindedness” conducive to making this social fabric (1972, ix). Thus, the explanations of Kerala’s claim to exceptionalism are essentially historical, which emphasise that the collective life and shared cultures were determined by mutual economic dependence under a socio-moral order decided by the caste hierarchy.

However, towards the latter half of the nineteenth century, a series of decisive events transformed the region’s social life. “Two processes—the growth of public politics and the fluctuations in women’s roles”—were identified instrumental in producing the ‘Kerala model’

(Jeffrey 1992, 9). The distinctive nature of the society—owing to the public political process, where communities take part in various forms, enabling “a new public world affected by the material well-being of the people”—was later encapsulated into the Kerala Model of Development (1992, 6). The history of Kerala from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century indicates the presence of an active public politics in the form of various social upheavals. As Robin Jeffrey notes, “once such people were involved in public activity, they were activated, or sensitised, to respond to other political appeals, first perhaps to the idealistic nationalism of Gandhi and often thereafter to the promise of the ‘scientific’ solutions of socialism and the Communist Party” (1992, 10). Thus, an active public process is central to how communities in Kerala have contributed to the region’s communitarian realm. As part of this emerging public politics, the varied nature of the social imaginaries in terms of its plurality in caste, religious variables are reflected in the mass mobilisations within the region. Various communities served as significant mobilisational factors in shaping the region’s politics through the movements for rights, recognition, and reforms (Biju 2016, 212). Thus, the political processes in the region always witnessed an interplay of politics and various community identities ranging from caste to religion, forming an amalgamation of these identities which is intrinsic to the development of Kerala and its ‘exceptional’ character.

II. A Communal/ Communitarian Exceptionalism?

Various interventions in terms of historical and political processes have contributed to the development of an active public politics, which shaped the community configurations in the region. These processes revealed the political manifestations of communities shaped by their immediate concerns, often adhering to the society’s secular values (Mathew 1989, 87). The nature of similar mass politics is reflected during agrarian movements, the nationalist movement, and community-based movements in Kerala. The everyday strain visible in these

movements is the conceptualisation of communities—caste and religious—as political categories (1989, 180). Thus, the significant character of these mobilisations was the political articulation of community identity (Jeffrey 1992, 51). These historical processes influenced the evolution of these community identities over time, which contributed to Kerala's communitarian realm. The cultural and political discourses between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, pertinent to the conceptualisations of the region, are predicated on its interactions with colonial modernity, reformist aspirations and developmental nationalism (Bose and Varughese 2015, 5). These processes enabled the communities to be the legitimate categories within the social imaginaries viable in the region's secular public sphere (Mathew 1989, 103). This has helped the discourse of 'exceptionalism' to dodge questions about minoritarian politics predicated on the binary of Hindu-Muslim that encompassed historical processes like Partition.

Colonial modernity, with its pros and cons, has paved the way for assertive mobilisations of various communities in the region, especially from the lower strata of society (Mohan 2015). The resistances against both British and local feudal lords, as it is observed, necessitated an idea of collective identification among the members of various caste and religious communities, leading to the reformulation of community identities (Gough 1968; Panikkar 1989). One of the salient features of Kerala's communities as historical categories is the agrarian structure prevalent in the region that privileged the *Janmis* and their negotiations with the feudal society.⁴³ The resistance of the lower caste people and minorities against the feudal oppression and colonial exploitation are interpreted as agrarian as well as anti-colonial struggles (Panikkar 1989; Menon 1994a, 9-39).

⁴³ *Janmis* are land or feudal lords who are predominantly Namboothiris and belong to the upper strata of Hindu caste system.

Social reform movements during the nineteenth century initiated by colonial modernity, missionary education, and community leadership contributed to the reconstitution of communities. It has enabled the transformation of caste communities through religious and modern education (Mohan 2015; Menon 2002, 1662). These movements “organised by caste and religious organisations used ascriptive identities for mobilisation against the evils generated by the ideas and values of pre-modern social structure. The common ground between them was their commitment to a more progressive Kerala society through modernisation” (Biju 2016, 213). Thus, these reformist ideas paved the way for the emergence of a communitarian consciousness as the communities refashioned themselves according to the principles associated with the emerging nation-state.

Nationalist movements in the region transcended caste-class-religious categories with its ability to incorporate various community mobilisations into the national campaign of the Congress (Kurup 1997, 579). For example, the declining matrilineal system led the landowning families to the movement in its initial phase, whereas the Khilafat movement attracted the Mappilas of Malabar (1997, 579-80). The timing and nature of the nationalist awakening in Kerala was varied in different parts of the region due to various socio-political aspects specific to the areas. (Manmathan 2013, 62). “[I]n Malabar where direct colonial rule existed, nationalist movement had made deep inroads by the beginning of the Gandhian era but in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin they were at low ebb” (2013, 62). Moreover, by the 1940s, the nationalist movement in the region had a distinctive class character due to its socialist phase that made possible the coming together of various communities (Kurup 1997, 580). Owing to the influence of the socialist ideologies, the course of national movement was shaped by the region’s immediate concerns, shaping the political consciousness of the

communities (Namboodiripad 1952, 51-58). Thus, the national politics of the region was interwoven with the social issues pursued by various caste and religious organisations.⁴⁴

The Communist movement in Kerala played a pivotal part in the constitution of the region as a distinct unit as it gained momentum at a historical juncture characterised by tremendous social transformations (Menon 1994a, 2). The movement was anchored on an ideological vision for an egalitarian social order. With its ability to accommodate different social concerns, the movement attracted various sections of society into its course. Thus, the Communist movement has managed to bring together communities to fight for a new social order, where the movement becomes the anchoring-point of various community mobilisations (Biju 2016, 213). The collapse of the matrilineal system, the emergence of caste and community-based organisations, and aspirations for developmental modernity became the contexts within which the movement negotiated with various community concerns. Even within the secular ideology of their class struggle, the Communist movement successfully incorporated agrarian struggles, social reform movements that have an essential caste character in Kerala (Namboodiripad 2007). Thus, the movement adopted multiple roles through constant engagement with the aspirations of social groups in the region. The movement initiated a proletarian fervour that had an imminent impact on society's political, social and cultural realms by mobilising the under-privileged sections. One of the initial struggles carried forward by the movement was against the rampant caste hierarchy in the society, which was later identified as the moment of the "reshaping of communism into the doctrine of caste inequality" (Menon 1994a, 2). Through systematic ideological propaganda, the Communist movement made crucial interventions in peasant-working class issues as well (Namboodiripad 2009). They gave a revolutionary vigour to the working-class movements and politicised the peasants

⁴⁴For a detailed discussion on the national movement in Kerala, see Namboodiripad (1952); Menon (1994a); Menon (1997); Menon (2001).

and workers. The movement had a considerable role in triggering the anti-feudal agitations in the region. Though the movement's face has been its class politics, Communism in Kerala facilitated the competitive bargaining of the communities vis-à-vis the state (Biju 2016, 212). Thus, the contribution of left ideologies to transcend community boundaries has been significant in the context of Kerala.⁴⁵

The intensified political manoeuvring that was taking place in the region and the changes in the national scenario necessitated a (re)imagining of the community to locate themselves in a society in constant flux. During the late 1940s, the Communist movement's manifestations in the region's political and social refashioning strengthened the *Aikya Kerala* movement [the movement for united Kerala].⁴⁶ The movement acted as a key agent in constructing and disseminating the idea of (sub)national imagination and cultural politics, which enabled Kerala to emerge as a distinctive region within modern India (Mannathukkaren 2021, 5). As Dilip Menon points out, various socio-political junctures in Kerala's history have contributed to the constitution of communities (1992, 2705). According to Menon, "there can only be 'conjunctural' creations of community when a temporary balance is achieved between various individual initiations and subjective perceptions of disparities" (2705). Among such junctures, the Communist movement managed to bring together different caste-class sections of the society in the fight against caste, feudal and colonial tyranny. While communities being the political actors can be considered the most crucial factor in the communitarian fabric of the

⁴⁵The studies on the Communist movement in Kerala forms a vast repertoire which is beyond the limited scope of this chapter. The effort here is to identify how the movement has been significant in the shaping of communities in Kerala as distinctive political categories which has been vital in the 'exceptionality' identified with the region. For detailed study on the Communist movement in Kerala, see (Nossiter 1984); for an official party perspective, see Namboodiripad (2009); the relationship between Communism and the caste question in Kerala is explored in Menon (1994a); For the role Left in Kerala in constituting the modern Kerala as a postcolonial society, see Mannathukkaren (2021).

⁴⁶The movement initiated the unification of Kerala in the 1940s consisting of Malabar (part of Madras presidency) and the princely states of Travancore and Kochi. For a detailed discussion on the movement, see Namboodiripad (2000, 248-52); Nair (1947).

region, the balance maintained by these communities in the region's political process becomes one of the intrinsic features of Kerala.

The movement for a unified linguistic state centred on Malayalam language has been instrumental in constructing a common *Malayalee* identity. Analysing diverse community imaginations in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century Kerala, G. Arunima unravels the various mediations in shaping communities in the region and their relation to the language question (2006a). According to her, the interventions in standardising language and the print culture made possible the creation of a modern literary public sphere in the region (2006a, 64). The interactions and negotiations between various communities and the emerging public sphere enunciated the changing dynamics of communities in the period. Amidst such interactions, the questions of ethnicity, territoriality and history become pertinent for different communities at play (63). Though Arunima's work focuses particularly on language and the print culture, the way she engages with particular communities' claims on the modern *Malayalee* identity has to be considered. This specific *Malayalee* identity is invoked, especially in the Communist movements and the later histories of various community mobilisations in the region. Arunima observes that Kerala's public sphere, both literary and political, is the site of interactions and contestations among various claims made by the communities (2006a, 74). It suggests a new phase in identity formation, which is taking place simultaneously with the contestations within the notion of *Malayalee*. Therefore, it can be argued that the creation of a sub-national identity in Kerala, predominantly based on the linguistic factor, was constantly being shaped by the community identities based on caste, class and religion markers.

The linguistic unification of Kerala by incorporating the princely states of Travancore and Kochi, and parts of Malabar in the Madras Presidency had a significant role in the identification of the region as 'exceptional' (Chiriyankandath 1996, 49). These regions, historically variant in terms of social as well as political processes, contributed to the region's

cultural diversity, when bound together. The southern parts populated predominantly by the Hindus, the central areas with a solid Christian presence and a notable Muslim population in the north added a multi-religious fabric to the region (1996, 49). In the political map, the Congress dominated southern regions and strong Communist roots in the northern regions together formed the modern state of Kerala (49). The idea of a unified Kerala received popularity by the beginning of the twentieth century besides the strengthening of the national and Communist movements. As linguistic identity is central to any national/ sub-national identity, the essence of *Malayalee* is paramount to the emergence of Kerala despite the divisions based on religion, caste and class. J. Devika has pointed out how the Left has invoked the idiom of development to formulate a united *Malayalee* identity that can be contextualised in the nation as well (2007). This sub-national identity has always been celebrated in Kerala, often on par with the national identity dominating all other local identities of caste, class and religion.⁴⁷ Thus, simultaneous to various political mobilisations in Kerala based on religion, caste and class, the call for a unified linguistic identity also emerged. Along with the discourses of rationality and development, which has been the cementing factors for the emergent *Malayalee* nationalism, one cannot deny language's central role in forming a robust sub-national imagination in Kerala (Devika 2007, 17).

The studies on the communal violence in India have dealt with the multiple aspects of the social realities, which resulted in perceiving violence as part of the false consciousness imparted by the religion (Chandra 2007). Rather than focusing on the essentialist differences among communities, the studies have discussed communal violence as the protracted effects of the refashioning of the society, disrupted social orders and rivalry in terms of unequal economic and social progress (2007, 15-31). In the context of Kerala, the history of the peaceful

⁴⁷James Chiriyankandath discusses how this identity has been anchored on an "alternate mythical past" through the celebration of national festivals like Onam and collective myths about distinctive heritage of religious coexistence (1996).

coexistence of various communities, identified with the region's 'exceptional' communitarian character, often omitted the incidents of communal violence in the region. Episodes of violent confrontations between communities have been occurring in the region despite its otherwise peaceful atmosphere. Studies that discuss the nature of communal violence in the region have attempted to look into the embedded tensions within society (Arafath 2016, Mannathukkaren 2016, Punathil 2019). Furthermore, a tradition of 'revolutionary violence' has been analysed in the course of Left in Kerala, exemplifying the presence of political violence in the region (Menon 2016). They unravel the presence of already existing histories of inter-community strife that go against the acclaimed 'model.'

The history of communal mobilisation resulting in violence is often traced to the Mappila resistances in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The series of outbreaks that began in 1836 turned into serious violent agitations in 1921. As part of strengthening the national movement, a call for religious solidarity emerged during the Khilafat Movement, culminating in the Rebellion in the Malabar region of Kerala in 1921. The movement witnessed a mass mobilisation, who predominantly constituted the Muslim agricultural labourers and peasants, against the British and the feudal landlords (Panikkar 1989). In Kerala, studies on Malabar Rebellion have attempted to delineate the character of violence in terms of divergent imperatives: agrarian or religious; anti-colonial or anti-feudal.⁴⁸ For instance, Kathleen Gough points out that the outbreaks were intrinsically an economic phenomenon. They were initiated as a direct response to the changes introduced by the British administration in the agricultural economy of Malabar (1968, 532). Along with other factors like police repression and agrarian grievances, K. N. Panikkar identifies complex associations between economic deprivation and religious ideology as grounds for the Rebellion (1989, 48). For him, the Rebellion exemplifies

⁴⁸For a detailed discussion on the Malabar rebellion, see Dale (1980); Wood (1987); Gangadharan (1989); Panikkar (1989); Namboodiripad (1997); Ansari (2005).

an instance in which religion was used for mobilising the Mappilas against the atrocities meted out to them (54). The Rebellion can be cited as an occasion for religious solidarity among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala.

However, the Rebellion is often identified as an instance that created deep communal fissures in Malabar and across the Malayalam speaking region (Dale 1980, 210; Gangadharan 1989, 75). The Congress, which mobilised the Mappilas under the Khilafat movement's aegis, withdrew as the movement turned violent. It led to the breaking away of Mappilas from Congress, which later helped the IUML to emerge as the prominent political voice of Muslims in Malabar (Shihabudeen 2010, 7). Pan-Islamic affiliations have been identified with the movement owing to its associations with the Khilafat movement (Dale 1980, 120). This characterisation rendered the revolt with several religious and ideological connotations. In 1921, the Khilafat Movement imparted a strong basis of religious ideology and collective organisation to the "pre-existing traditions of religious militancy and social conflict" in the region (Dale 1975, 97). In such a scenario, the colonial as well as regional interpretations of the movement described it as 'communal' where Mappila was seen as 'fanatic' (2005, 45). Hence, the Rebellion is alleged of creating a rift between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. Thus, apart from its agrarian or economic imperatives, the Malabar Rebellion becomes a vital moment in the history of the communal tensions in Kerala.⁴⁹

The Rebellion created a growing sense of disjuncture and alienation among Muslims belonging to Kerala's otherwise communitarian social realm. To understand the condition of

⁴⁹As part of the recent decision of the central government, many of the prominent leaders of the Rebellion including Variyamkunnath Kunjahammad Haji are excluded from the *Dictionary of Martyrs of Indian Freedom Struggle*, a joint venture of the Government of India and the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR). The movement and its leaders are considered part of the Indian Freedom Struggle by the Kerala State Government. Furthermore, the 347 names omitted were included in the dictionary when it was published initially in March 2019 (*The New Indian Express* 2021). It has foregrounded the thesis of Hindu right-wing forces to paint the Rebellion as essentially communal. This apprehensive act illustrates how historical processes can be manifested in the ways of the present, often negating the multiple interpretations possible.

the Muslims belonging in Kerala's regional context, M.T Ansari looks into the history of the Malabar Rebellion (2005; 2016, 71- 120). Revealing the "fanatic" causation in the Rebellion's interpretations, he discusses the presence of the Muslim otherness in the cultural unconscious of Kerala (2016, 73). Though the movement began as part of the Congress's mass mobilisation under the Khilafat movement, it has forever entrenched an "image of the communality of Muslims" in India's national imagination (Ansari 2016, 142). As argued by Ansari, this othering is revealed in the constant appearance of "Malabar" as a 'shorthand notation' for the Muslim community and criminality throughout the history of various cultural productions in Kerala (142). Malabar metaphorically denotes the regional and religious aspirations of a community purportedly prone to "irrational and separatist demands" (142). Paradoxically, Muslims form the 'other' despite Kerala's 'exceptional' inter-community relations as "the global phenomenon of Islamophobia is not alien to the region even if it is not framed by frequent episodes of communal violence" (Mannathukkaren 2016, 226).

Kerala's advantage is that various social, political and historical reasons, placed within a complementary alliance, have contributed to the state's "amalgam of communal and class politics" (Chiriyankandath 1996, 46). However, for the communities to be politically legitimate categories in the modern nation-state, stringent adherence to the ideology of political secularism, at least in their public behaviours, is a prerequisite. This has been emphasised as the sole reason for the 'exceptional' communitarian realm in Kerala (Chiriyankndath 1993, 664). The region's Hindu stakeholders who form the majority of the population impart a principle of political secularism and its communitarian manifestations, and it has been vividly discussed in the academic scholarship on the region (Arunima 2006b; Devika 2007). Such a nature of political secularism often compels communities like religious minorities and less privileged caste categories to tailor themselves into the majoritarian/dominant manifestations of collective imaginaries, even at the cost of erasing their specificities. In Kerala's context,

many social, political and cultural deliberations can be seen as part of such accommodations into the mainstream by the minorities and caste groups in movements, mobilisations and assertions. For instance, the manifestations of religious communities like Syrian Christians enable them to establish themselves as a '*jati*' for legitimate participation within the region's developmental strategy (Devika and Varghese 2010, 9). In the case of political mobilisation among Muslims, despite the historical alienation after the Rebellion and Partition, the IUML has been identified as a suitable example of liberal community politics in the region (Chiriyankandath 1996).

The Muslim community in Kerala despite their minority status has been very influential in the region, contributing to its political and cultural distinctiveness. They have been identified with a regional character which enabled them to adopt the political secularism of the region. Through cultural commonalities which define the *Malayalee*, they were assimilated to the cultural consciousness of Kerala (Miller 1992, 25). According to Miller, the Mappilas of Malabar, a significant presence within the Muslim community of Kerala, have remained India's 'unknown Muslims' for the absence of political mobilisations among the community until the Rebellion (1992, 3). However, the Rebellion in 1921 can be considered as one of the primary causes for the development of a strong community feeling among the Mappilas. It has led to the establishment of several Muslim community organisations, which made numerous engagements with Kerala Muslims' civic and political life (Karassery 2010). Among these organisations, the IUML has attempted to project their politics as community politics rather than communal politics (Santhosh and Visakh 2020, 51).

The Rebellion and its resultant developments in the community politics paved the way for the Muslim community's labelling as communal. As evident in the Khilafat Movement, the idea of pan-religious nationalism, which triggered the resistance against the British in India, came to be labelled as religious fanaticism. When the violence associated with these revolts

forced the Hindus and the Congress leaders to disown the violent agitations in Malabar, such withdrawal also further distanced Mappilas from both. This distancing arguably instilled a sense of separatism among the Muslims and Hindus of Kerala which is still evident in the inter-communal relations between these communities (Punathil 2013). In order to cope with this marginalisation, the IUMML has shaped itself according to the prominent liberal community politics in the region over the years. Their moorings in Kerala Muslims' religious community have been strengthened, and their position in the governmental mechanisms has intensified through competitive, peaceful bargaining (Santhosh and Visakh 2020, 51). Instead of mobilising the masses antagonistically against other communities, IUMML has successfully mobilized the community over the years without yielding to fundamentalist positions, especially during critical moments like the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992. The community which is considered backward in their social and economic status has been uplifted considerably by IUMML by investing in education and other social welfare activities. IUMML has exemplified a political model based on empowerment and development for the minority communities across the globe (Madampat 2015). Owing to the meticulously adopted methods of IUMML for the political and social upliftment of the community, the Muslims in Kerala "feels and lives out a sense of equal citizenship, perhaps beyond his fellow religionists' dreams in the rest of India" (Madampat 2015). In the context of Kerala, as evidenced in the works of these organisations, the emphasis is given to a "rationalised Muslim life", based on "moral as well as socio-economic advancement" to the community. (Kanchana 2012, 282). This is often identified as the reason for Muslims in the region not experiencing the ghettoisation and marginalisation experienced by the community in other parts of India (2012, 283-284). The discussions attempted here foreground the contribution of the Muslims in Kerala to the region's 'exceptionalism' by asserting their regional specificities and political assertiveness for developmental needs.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned discussions reveal how various social and political processes where communities have been the major stakeholders, have contributed to the historical trajectory of Kerala as a unique region within India. Ashis Nandy, identifies the presence of multiculturalism which imparts a unique civic culture to the region as evidenced in the cosmopolitanism of Kochi, a port city in central Kerala.⁵⁰ According to him, it is the presence of communal plurality, which gives room for communal distances and hostilities, that amounts to the cultural amity of Kochi (2000, 305). These distances and hostilities with their specific culturally defined meanings, Nandy argues, develop inbuilt checks against mass violence and nihilistic rage (305). The long history of multiculturalism can be attributed to other regions in Kerala, which validate years of coexistence without giving away to moments of major communal conflicts. In a similar exploration based on Calicut, Ashutosh Varshney talks about the civic organisations in Kerala that enable a smooth integration of Hindus and Muslims. He talks about a “deep inter-communal civic engagement” that marks the social life in Calicut (2002, 121). Organised community politics in Kerala have managed to maintain a competitive spirit among different community levels by working within democratic politics. It has prevented the growth of religious antagonism in society to a certain level. Consequently, the community politics in Kerala stands unique in the discourses of religious nationalism in India.

The politics in Kerala, as it is evident in the discussions of various social and political movements attempted here, has been significantly shaped by the caste question. Even in the contemporary situation, caste continues to be a dominant idiom in the politics of Kerala. As

⁵⁰The article puts forward the argument that identifies the presence of a ‘community based normative frame’ for [Kochi]. In such a frame, Nandy propounds “multiculturalism as a culturally embedded identity in which others are telescoped into self as inalienable parts of the self” (2000, 327). In the context of Kochi, communities coexist through the “internalization of culturally significant collective others” (327). Nandy invokes lifeways of the past rather than the modern progressive frames as the reasons for the multicultural life in the region. The story of Kochi, which Nandy narrates, can be extended to analyse the life of communities in Kerala. For further details see Nandy (2000).

the master narrative of politics is largely influenced by caste rather than religion, the possibility of forming civic links between various religious groups emerges as it is evident in the case of Hindus and Muslims in various parts of the region (Varshney 2002, 163). The interpretations of Muslim life in Kerala, Varshney argues, reveal a sense of assimilation influenced by the dominant regional narrative of caste (2002, 163-64). Devika and Varghese, in their analysis of the Syrian community assertions in Kerala, argue that communalism in Kerala society refers not to hatred among communities but competitive politics based on rights and resources (2010, 37). In this way, the academic intelligentsia has always been careful not to misidentify Kerala's community politics as religious nationalism or communalism.⁵¹ This academic consensus in which communities are located within an 'exceptional' political arena, where developmental aspirations and political participation become the driving forces, is the dominant characteristic with which Kerala has been identified.

These observations are not hinting that there are no instances of community politics transforming into communal negotiations in Kerala. The rise of Hindu nationalism at the national level and the growth of Islamist tendencies in the global scenario has made an impact on the region as it witnesses the rise of polarisation on religious lines contrary to the dominant trend of non-confrontational and peaceful co-existence of diverse communities.⁵² Irrespective of the absence of considerable success in the electoral politics in Kerala, they have been trying to make inroads to the society through various cultural engagements. The recent controversy regarding the Sabarimala issue has created repercussions in the region and will have broader consequences in its multicultural fabric.⁵³ Similarly, the discussions around CAA and NRC have unsettled the sense of Muslim belonging in the nation, forcing the Muslim community in

⁵¹See Mathew (1989, 11); Chiriyankandath (1993, 665; 1996, 60).

⁵²See Santhosh and Visakh (2019: 52- 53); Santhosh and Paleri (2021).

⁵³The community mobilisation made possible by the Hindu right-wing organisations in the aftermath of the Supreme Court order which sanctioned women-entry to Sabarimala temple substantiates their strengthening presence in the region (Bijukumar 2019).

the region to be more vulnerable.⁵⁴ With its strong foothold in the community, IUML has been identified countering the emergence of extremist trends within Islam in various ways through civic engagement (Santhosh and Visakh 2020). Through IUML's political interferences, the Islamic organisations in Kerala have engaged in multiple kinds of social activism and tried not to delimit themselves to religious education and petitioning to governments (Mannathukkaren 2016, 234).

Afore-mentioned discussions highlight the fragmentary nature of political and religious affairs in Kerala. However, the history of communalism in the region demonstrates cultural cohabitation among different religious communities, which is often translated into a “non-antagonistic” form of communalism (Mannathukkaren 2016, 238). As it has been already discussed, the studies of communalism in Kerala have always engaged with communities' political engagement in securing secular needs. The ‘communal road’ to a secular Kerala has been manifested by implementing religious/caste identities in bargaining for access to power and resources (Mathew 1989). Such a form of “liberal communism” has been identified as the predominant trend in Kerala where “there is only a consciousness of collective secular interests that are seen as different and distinct from other communities” (Chandra 2007, 45; Mannathukkaren 2016, 238).

III. Literature and the construction of a *Malayalee* identity

Literature and society have evolved together in Kerala through continuous interaction and exchange (Satchidanandan 2012, 1). As various transformations were happening in the society, literature also developed from “devotional to secular in content” and “elitist to

⁵⁴The IUML approached the Supreme Court of India against the implementation of CAA and NRC. The party filed a plea, seeking a stay on the Act and sought a clarification regarding whether NPR and NRC be prepared across the country (BBC 2019). A regional party like IUML addressing the issue is indicative of the pan-Indian implications of CAA and NRC.

democratic in style” (2012, 1). In such a scenario, the emergence of a robust regional imagination in Kerala, with its ‘exceptional’ communitarian consciousness, has influenced the literary productions in the region and vice versa (Panikkar 2012). Apart from the factors hitherto discussed in the chapter, the literary productions in Malayalam, across the history, involving various writers, genres, and themes have depicted the distinctiveness of the region. How the literary landscapes in Malayalam mirrored society’s social and political conditions have been pertinent to the regional imagination in Kerala (George 2009). However, tracing the entire Malayalam literary history that has made significant interventions in the region would be impossible within the limited purview of this chapter. Instead, this section explores how the development of communities and the tremendous changes in society are addressed in the literary scenario, especially during the critical years that witnessed the growth and consolidation of communities and the formation of the nation-state. Furthermore, the way the literary arena has translated the process of the transformation of modern Kerala into a distinctive political unit has been a significant concern in the present study. As various cultural and social processes have transformed the society, the resonances of these changes were felt in the region’s literature, art and cinema. Among these cultural artefacts, the literary scenario, which is of particular interest to the present study, was characterised by an ample amount of prose writings that vividly captured the defining spirit of contemporary society.

Studies have noted how the early novel tradition in Malayalam, often considered the offshoot of colonial modernity, began as community chronicles, placing them in the complex juncture of transition from tradition to modernity (Arunima 1997; Menon 2002). For instance, O. Chandu Menon’s *Indulekha*⁵⁵ (1889) and Potheri Kunjambu’s *Saraswativijayam*⁵⁶ (1893) are read as narratives of communities under the changing ethos of social and political worlds

⁵⁵O. Chandumenon’s *Indulekha*, published in 1889, is considered the first novel in Malayalam that caters to the defining characteristics of a novel.

⁵⁶Potheri Kunjambu’s *Saraswativijayam* (1893) was one of the early novels written by the members of a lower caste community in Kerala.

in which they were set. On the one hand, Chandumenon's Madhavan emerges as the epitome of modern English educated *Malayalee*, the quintessential citizen of independent India, idealised in the national imagination (Ansari 2016, 141- 43). On the other hand, *Saraswativijayam* is characterised by the expression of a lower caste self who enjoys the modern ideals of equality engendered by colonial modernity (Menon 2004, 495). Thus, different modalities of colonial modernity, which may not always be expressed in the nationalist aspirations, appear in the early Malayalam novels where the communities are figured as the anchoring-points for social transformations (Menon 2004, 483). Malayalam novels written by lower caste groups in nineteenth century Kerala were significant in continuing the debates in the public sphere which emerged due to social modernity. These novels suggest alternative spatial imaginations centred on communities (2004, 484). Other Malayalam novels like *Ghatakavadham* [The Slayer Slain, 1865] by Mrs Richard Collins, Potheri Kunjambu's *Saraswativijayam* [Victory of Knowledge, 1893] and *Sukumari* (1897) written by Joseph Mooliyil, address colonial modernity and its inherent contradiction of slavery from the lifeworld of caste experiences (Menon 2004). Thus, these literary imaginations unravel the existing societal tensions from specific community positions and aspire to transcend the limitation of such marginal identities through the value system imparted by modernity and western education. As the early novels of the nineteenth century depicted the changing nature of societies from the worlds of caste communities, the novels of the twentieth century addressed the class consciousness in the society and the hopes for an equal society (George 2009, vi).

Into the twentieth century, the social and political upheavals induced by two consecutive World Wars, the widening national movements, and the growing Communist and Socialist ideologies at home drastically transformed the literary realm (Nair 2010, 817). The Left discourses in Kerala delegitimised the past and invoked the prospects of an egalitarian

future (Menon 1994a). As mentioned earlier, ‘social’ novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are characterised by the questions of self and community. The upper caste, elite, modern self in *Indulekha* and the lower caste self, liberated through the idioms of religion and modern education in *Saraswathivijayam* are part of this narrative realm. However, the literary landscape that followed the period foregrounded a novel variant of self that was equally (sub)nationalistic and transcended the societal categorisations that delimit a human being (Raveendran and Jayasree 2017, 12). The writings engaged with the themes that explored the relationship between individuals and their social circumstances and portrayed the revolutionary vigour against the prevailing inequalities in society. This transition has been significant in the way Kerala emerged as a modern political society during the twentieth century, an identity which has been the face of the region until today.

Arunima identifies a ‘crisis of the self’ in the early social novels of the nineteenth century in their attempts to appropriate the aesthetic of the modern genre they were addressing (1997, 272). This crisis resulted from various negotiations between tradition and modernity that the particular historical juncture was experiencing. However, the new sensibility that characterised the socio-political and literary landscapes where the Left movements significantly influenced the transformations in Kerala society and it reflected in the literary scenario as well (Raveendran and Jayasree 2017, 10). The first half of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented social and political metamorphosis in Kerala society that has been highlighted as a critical historical juncture in the development of Kerala as a modern state. The role of the Left movements, from its Socialist phase to the Communist, has been immense in these social transformations and is reverberated in the literary landscape as well. The political commitment of writers has been a potential concern raised during the period as these movements conceived literature as a social product (Kumar 2007). Amidst the discussions on the social purpose of literature, the founding conference of the Progressive Writers’

Association held at Lucknow in 1936 created impacts on the writers in Kerala as well. As a result, *Jeevalsahitya Prasthanam*⁵⁷ was formed in Kerala in 1937 to foster a literary culture that is sensitive to societal concerns. The movement marked the Left's advent into the Malayalam cultural realm to be followed by theatre and cinema (Mannathukkaren 2021; Radhakrishnan 2015).

Interestingly, the initiative to form the *Jeevalsahitya Prasthanam* developed through the efforts of Socialist leaders in Kerala like E. M. S. Namboodiripad, A. Madhavan and K. Damodaran, among others. It is not surprising that EMS later became one of the founding pillars of Communist politics in modern Kerala as he marked his presence in wide arenas concerning the region's social life. His article titled "Jeevat Sahityavum Soundharya Bodhavum" [Literature for Life and the Sensibility of Beauty] published in 1937 challenged the existing perceptions on the relationship between literature and society (Namboodiripad 1937). It served as the initial manifesto for *Jeevalsahithya Prasthanam*. The founding of *Jeevalsahithya Prasthanam*, which was later developed into *Purogamana Sahithya Prasthanam* [Progressive Literary association] in 1944 became a crucial event in the transition of Malayalam literature.

All these incredible historical moments catapulted the literary arena into the hands of a politically committed generation of writers. These writers were receptive to the tremendous changes taking place at home and elsewhere. Inspired by the ethos of those times, the Progressive Writers Association gained momentum. They believed in the writers' role in unravelling the social reality and questioning the rampant injustice. These writers' generation belonged to the most eventful period in Indian history, ranging from the peak years of the national movement to the horrendous days surrounding Partition and the nation-state's

⁵⁷*Jeevalsahitya* means 'living literature' or 'literature of life.' This group sided with the Art for Life's Sake, against Art for Art's Sake view, and was an endeavour influenced by Marxist-Communists who stood firmly with the peasant-working class organisations to develop a new literary form.

formation. Ideologically bound to the socialist and Communist leanings, the Progressive Writers' Movement was a political and social transition as much as a literary one. The movement aimed at creating collective consciousness in society negating the old prejudices.

The movement has been heralded by the literary trio - P. Kesavadev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla and Vaikom Muhamad Basheer - who transformed the Malayalam literary scene with their portrayals which became 'representative' of the cross-section of Kerala society (Nair 2010). With the new awakening in the literary arena, narrative worlds and characters, unfamiliar to the Malayalam literary world until then, found voice and expression in their stories. Working class stories, peasant life and caste inequalities - their stories were filled with the core of social life in Kerala. The trope of social realism,⁵⁸ incorporated in their narrative techniques, transformed their works as the chronicles of *Malayalee* social lives in Kerala. Furthermore, social realism emphasised the specificities of real-life social conditions constituted in a literary work. Such works explicitly dealt with 'real conditions' in a given society at a particular historical juncture where the literary response produced is no longer passive (Satchidanandan 2012, 4).

In terms of the ways in which the Left in Kerala established their hegemony, the cultural interventions they attempted especially in the twentieth century has been significant (Mannathukkaren 2021). Their attempt to establish a national popular⁵⁹ in the region transformed the identity of Kerala nationally and internationally. The movement idealised the transcending of societal markers like caste and religion through the notions of identity and self they addressed in their cultural interventions. Though the idea of a national popular as

⁵⁸Social realism refers to an artistic movement that is expressed predominantly in visual art forms and later extended to literature as well. Through the portrayals of life's struggles, the movement depicts social and racial injustice. It also idealises an attempt to convey a message of political and social protest that is edged with satire.

⁵⁹Antonio Gramsci proposed the idea of 'national popular' as a collective imagination in order to bring together the north-west and south regions of Italy which were fragmented by the differences in the peasant and proletariat classes. Through national popular, Gramsci argued that the establishment of (Left's) hegemony becomes possible as the collective will (Gramsci 2014, 132).

envisioned by the Left has been inefficient in addressing many of the central questions developed in the region in its later years, it has been still attached to the ‘exceptional’ status assigned to the region (Mannathukkaren 2021). It is the early attempts in this Left project which is evident in the kind of identity configurations and egalitarian principle put forward by the literature of the Progressive Writers Movement.

Aijaz Ahmad, in his critique of Jameson’s rhetoric of “national literature”, proposes how the ideologies of Socialism and Marxism can supplant the function of the literature of ‘Third World’ countries as national allegories (1987, 8). The social realism in Malayalam literature also projects the new citizens’ vernacular aspirations by addressing society’s issues from specific locations. The literary trio represented by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, and P. Kesavadev engaged with a similar conception of literature defined by the social purpose of literature. Besides the existence of a parallel world populated by the identities based on caste, class and language, their articulation on par with the national identity points to a continuous assertion of the regional. Thus, Malayalam literature in the first-half of the twentieth century, marked by the specific regional concerns and defined by a socialist ideology, adhered to the communitarian imagining of the region.

V.J. Varghese presents the “dissident genealogy” of modernity in Kerala as an “ensemble of hybrid assemblages” which contributes to Kerala’s “extraordinary claims of exceptionalism” (2012-13, 2). Various political as well as social processes have been instrumental in the shaping of communities as principal agents in this narrative of exceptionalism. The previous discussions on various socio-political movements in the region signal the prospect of a rather inclusive secular public sphere in Kerala. This chapter has been an attempt to identify some of those factors that have been considered instrumental in developing a communitarian consciousness in the region. By locating particular historical events that gave new and

distinctive definitions to the ‘community,’ the chapter attempted to prepare a backdrop that would complement and explain the *Malayalee* perceptions of Partition.

Considering the specific instances of mobilisations in Kerala, the chapter tried to understand how solidarities are created and communities are (re)constituted during such movements. Although they emerge from the community’s existing structure and content, the nature, course, and interpretative possibilities of these movements shape the community in return. Such instances are often identified with the refashioning of communities informed by the political secularism and developmental strategies pertinent to Kerala society. Thus, various mobilisations- social and political- are configured where communities are placed tantamount to the social imaginaries considered legitimate to the modern state of Kerala.

As pointed out, the claim of the subnational imagination in Kerala is diverse in terms of its content and spirit. Though language remains the principal unifying factor that binds the region, the socio-political aspects of communities strengthen the ‘exceptional’ communitarian social life. The language of development remains the dominant idiom through which the region is presented. Nevertheless, multiple social and political processes have contributed to the region’s formation, where communities are the primary stakeholders. Thus, the communities being the significant actors in the political process that shapes the region, the discussions of Partition in Kerala are intrinsically related to the community configurations that are not limited to the religious categories of Hindu and Muslim. While community politics steer Kerala’s regional discourse, their developmental aspirations are shaped within the postcolonial nation-state’s secular politics.

The movements discussed above and the academic literature that identified the ‘exceptional’ ways in which they contributed to Kerala’s communitarian society restrained the ‘communal’ strains attached to these mobilisations. Religion, especially for the minority communities, can be a mobilisational tool, as evident in *Vimochana Samaram* [Liberation

Struggle]⁶⁰ or the political career of IUML. However, within the political and social milieu of Kerala, these movements are identified to be adhering to political secularism, which is impinged on the reformist and developmental aspirations of the minority communities. Thus, how religion as a political tool is understood and employed in Kerala deviates from the patterns in other parts of the country, especially its manifestations in the Partition narratives. When the nationalist politics in the northern part of the country was centred on religious narratives around the binary of Hindu/Muslim, it assumed the nature of caste-class politics in Kerala. Furthermore, it has been argued as one of the sole reasons behind establishing a unique network of inter-communal relationships in Kerala.⁶¹ To these regional discourses in Kerala which is conceived with an attribute of ‘exceptionalism’ that I locate Partition, as a collective experience and a paradigmatic moment for the religious communities, especially for Muslims and their political belonging in the subcontinent. The literary narratives on Partition emerged during the critical junctures in the history of the region in terms of the emergence of the nation-state and the constitution of a unified *Malayalee* identity are analysed in the following chapter.

⁶⁰Vimochana Samaram [Liberation Struggle] was a political as well as community resistance against the first Communist government in Kerala from an alliance formed by the Catholic Church in the region, Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Indian National Congress. This movement was against the land and education reforms introduced by the E.M.S. Namboodiripad led government that were not in the particular interest of these communities and it culminated in the dismissal of the government before the completion of their term.

⁶¹See the arguments of Varshney (2002) and Devika and Varghese (2010).

CHAPTER 3

‘Writing it off as Madness:’ Reading Partition in Select Literary Writings in Malayalam

Historical phenomena have impacted writers’ sensibilities, resulting in some of the best-known literary works in what has been loosely categorised as ‘historical fiction.’⁶² The World Wars, the Holocaust and the French Revolution have influenced generations of writers to produce stories of power, violence, displacement, pain and fears, which have been the recurrent motifs in these narratives. These writers’ narratives have led to a closer and more diverse understanding of these histories and their afterlives. Many critical moments in history across the world have constantly stimulated the creative faculty of writers.⁶³

Similarly, the historical processes involving the geographical partitions that happened across the world, often resulting from wars and processes of decolonisation or democratisation, have led to the production of what came to be generally known as ‘Partition Literature.’ The contexts of partition in Ireland (1919), India (1947), Palestine (1948) and Korea (1952) have resulted in the creation of literature that captured the political and social ruptures involved in these processes (Cleary 2003). The protracted effects of separation, conflicts, animosity and trauma produced in the aftermath of these events have figured in both cultural and critical narratives. Similarly, the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 also affected the literary faculty, resulting in some of the greatest works ever. Due to the interdisciplinary methods

⁶²Historical fiction, often used synonymously with the historical novel, corresponds to the literary genre set in a particular historical period. The quintessential feature identified in this genre is its delineation of the historical contexts, social conditions and actual figures of the particular period they are addressing. Some of the well-known works in the category include Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831), and in Malayalam literature, *Marthandavarma* (1891) by C. V. Raman Pillai pioneers the category.

⁶³For instance, Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) has become a distinctive souvenir of the French Revolution. The fictional landscape shaped by the Revolution was centered on the ‘Individual’ breaking away from the traditional system of Monarchy. The philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire inspired ‘liberalism’ in literature’ and thematised the social realities of the conditions of the poor and the aspect of social justice in the backdrop of the revolution. Likewise, Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869) foretold the saga of the Napoleonic Empire and *Catch-22* (1961) by Joseph Heller unfolds the hideous experiences during World War II. These literary representations of significant historical junctures like the Napoleonic invasion in Russia and World Wars etc. portrayed the political panorama in which they were borne and represented the conflicts involved in such historical processes. For a brief discussion of these works, see Greenblatt and Abrams (2018, 3-27; 1017- 1041; 1887-1910).

developed within Partition studies, these literary works have been considered as an integral part of their repertoire.⁶⁴ They have been considered instrumental in understanding the histories of Partition as evidenced in Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Urdu poem, "Shubh-e-Azadi" [Freedom's Dawn 1947], Amrita Pritam's novel, *Pinjar* [Skeleton 1950] in Punjabi and Khushwant Singh's English novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956).

Under the category of 'Partition literature,' these literary productions in the South Asian context are often considered as significant as holocaust narratives or partition literature from Palestine or Israel. In this chapter, I engage with select literary narratives in Malayalam which directly engages with Partition. Through a critical evaluation of these narratives, the chapter analyses the experiences of Partition as they are portrayed in these works, thereby historicising these experiences in the particular socio-political and religious milieu of Kerala. The attempt is to analyse these texts as Partition narratives from the specific contexts that bore them. In doing so, the chapter interrogates and contests the absence of the southern parts of India while discussing Partition in the context of South Asian history. For this purpose, the chapter deals with select narratives, predominantly from the Progressive Writers Movement in Malayalam literature. Dominating the literary modernity in Malayalam during the twentieth century with their explicit leanings to Socialist and Marxist ideologies, these writings, I argue, have been instrumental in forging a theory of Partition informed by the ideas of a nation emerging from the particular socio-political contexts in Kerala.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of the chapter traces the literary turn in Partition historiography by looking at the works of Gyanendra Pandey (1994), Alok Bhalla (1994, 1999), Mushirul Hasan (1998), Suvir Kaul (2001), Jill Didur (2006), and Kavita Daiya (2008). The section tries to delineate how literary narratives have contributed to

⁶⁴Partition history, owing to its revisionist turn, has incorporated a wide array of narratives, including fictional, ethnographic, and archival, among others, into its repertoire. It has imparted a new perspective in understanding the historical process of Partition in the Indian context.

the histories of Partition, which will help to contextualise select narratives in the repertoire of Partition studies. The second section reads select texts as Partition narratives in Malayalam and identifies how Partition is invoked in these narratives. Such an attempt necessitates that these narratives be identified, compared and contrasted with the ‘mainstream’ literary narratives on Partition. It enables in identifying common themes, motifs and ideologies, which are employed in understanding Partition. This section also probes the question of how individuals and communities are represented in these narratives, thereby revealing their configurations in the *Malayalee* understanding of Partition.

The third section locates selected narratives in the ‘exceptional’ socio-political scenario of Kerala. The stories are analysed in the light of how communities evolve, and how the idea of the nation is constituted in the context of Kerala. The section also addresses several other questions such as the ways in which these texts present Partition as a part of the ‘collective consciousness’ of the south and how the southern representations of Partition mobilise a pan-Indian sentiment of Partition and weave a reality for Kerala that allows the region to be a part of the collectivity called nation. The fourth section illustrates the narratives’ social and political significance as a historical text in understanding Partition and the region of Kerala. In a retrospective introspection, this section also analyses Kerala society’s ‘exceptional’ communitarian nature and its politics based on these narratives.

I. Partition and Literature

Partition has evoked the sensibilities of writers across genres, generations and languages in India. In Urdu language, which has been the most fertile soil for Partition literature, Saadat Hasan Manto’s⁶⁵ works serve as testimonies of those times due to his poignant portrayals

⁶⁵Saadat Hasan Manto (1912- 1955) is a stalwart of twentieth century Urdu literature, engaging primarily with the genre of short stories. He migrated to Lahore, Pakistan during Partition, leaving a sense of dislocation in him

problematizing the logic of ‘naturalness’ of the nation. His short story collections reflect his transition from being a staunch proponent of the Progressive Writers Movement to a latent sceptic of ‘nation’ as is revealed in stories like “Toba Tek Singh” (1955) (Jalal 2013, 1). Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) gained international critical acclaim and is today the best example of the genre winning the Booker Prize in 1981 and the Booker of the Booker in 1993 and 2008.⁶⁶

Even after seven decades, Partition remains an inexhaustible vessel, prompting writers to revisit the theme. The everydayness of Partition and its manifold and unrevealed dimensions involving living tragedies continue to motivate them. For many, the personal tragedies of dislocation and the resultant trauma have been the driving forces. The violence experienced and the bafflement felt at the sudden occurrence of events have influenced the creative sensibilities of writers in ways that no other historical juncture in South Asia could. Many similar personal, political, national and cultural elements have also been identified as the reasons for the persistent invocation of Partition in the literary works from the subcontinent. Subhakanta Behera, commenting on the Kavyas of Odia writer Radhanath Ray, talks about the artistic capability of the writers in creating a ‘make-believe’ history (2000, 1901).⁶⁷ According to him, the key figures in Indian literature talked about a particular linguistic or regional identity. They introduced a type of narrative interweaving materials from history (1901). He underscores the significance of the assumed symbolic meaning of these narratives in given

forever. Acclaimed for portraying the harsh realities of Partition, his poignant stories with severe disdain for Partition, leaves an excruciating honesty and provocative satire for his readers. For a detailed discussion on Manto, the writer and his contributions in a crucial juncture in the subcontinent’s history, see Jalal (2013).

⁶⁶Salman Rushdie is an internationally acclaimed author of Indian origins writing in English. Rushdie rose to fame with his second novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1981) representing postcolonial national experience in South Asia. As it is featured in the novel, he prods on the elements of historical fiction, magical realism, and transnationalist tendencies in his works, making him one of the finest writers of postcolonial fiction in English. The novel is considered one of the first novels in English which revisited the questions of Partition and the resultant questions of nation formation (Daiya 2008).

⁶⁷Radhanath Ray is a prominent literary figure in Odia literature who belonged to the later part of the nineteenth century. He authored major kavyas in Odia like *Kedara Gauri*. He was considered significant in the revival of Odia language against the supremacy of Bengali (Mohanti 2009, 19- 123).

historical contexts. Behera also identifies a deep sense of history possessed by both the writer and their corresponding works, and these literary works have often played a significant role in constructing historical narratives (1901). Often these fictional depictions present a ‘metaphorically congruent’ description of the related historical events (1904). At the same time, these literary creations also helped in unravelling unknown dimensions of history. According to K. N. Panikkar, historians have used literature as a source for ‘understanding social processes’ (2012, 4). Literature, most often, eases the task of understanding the complex and violent transitions in society as history alone is incapable of doing justice in recording a series of events, bizarre and complex, often foregrounding their complementary existence (Panikkar 2012, 7).

The inclusion of literary narratives as the ‘evidence,’ ‘counter narratives’ and ‘emotional chronicles’ have often reiterated the urge to find the ‘human’ and ‘universal’ in literature and thereby Partition. These narratives have brought out varied understandings of Partition in its relation to the workings of nation and human existence. Khuswant Singh’s⁶⁸ *Train to Pakistan*, published in 1956, is one of the most widely read novels written in English on the most extensive human catastrophe in the history of the subcontinent. It has made pathways across geographies and generations with its moving portrayal of Partition’s confusions and calamities. The novel’s wide popularity can be reasoned out to its deviation from the high political narratives while appraising what has to be considered the ‘human’ dimension of this history (Daiya 2008, 31). As a response to Partition from the early national period, the novel shows the non-congruency between communality and nationality (2008, 47). “*Train to Pakistan* illustrates that often, people cared little for the nationality being thrust upon

⁶⁸Khuswant Singh (1915-2014) is one of the leading figures in Partition literature in India. His magnum opus, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is considered the outcome of his own experiences during Partition. An eponymous film released in 1998, is today considered to be one of the poignant portrayals of Partition written in English. His literary contributions are shaped by his strong comprehension of Indian history, culture and polity. For a detailed discussion on Singh, see Dhawan (2001).

them, and responded ambivalently to communalism, in a political situation where one nation (Pakistan) was being explicitly founded based on religious commonality—*for Muslims*” (54). Though writers have been incredibly moved by the horrors of Partition since the 1940s, it is with the ‘revisionist’ turn in the historiography of Partition that the fictional writings find their prominence in the theoretical conceptualisations of Partition.⁶⁹

The revisionist turn in Partition historiography has been marked by its preoccupation with the idea of the experience. The cultural narratives around the theme have considered the documents serving the purpose of expressing the multiple voices involved in the process of Partition. Scholars like Gyanendra Pandey, Mushirul Hasan, Jill Didur, Kavita Daiya, and Suvir Kaul have utilised this turn by incorporating literary narratives into the understanding of Partition and interpreting them to derive their varied meanings. Kavita Daiya points out how these revisionist approaches in Partition historiography have been marked by two interesting turns (2008, 10). Along with the feminist and subaltern studies approaches, which engaged with the experiences and memories on Partition, there has also been a translation turn of Partition literature from Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi, resulting in several new volumes and collections of novels, poetry and short stories on Partition (10). Such renewed interest in the significance of fictional representations have resulted in the compilation of these narratives, as evidenced in the works of Alok Bhalla (1994) and Mushirul Hasan (1993). Alok Bhalla has compiled an anthology of short stories on Partition from different languages in four volumes.⁷⁰ While moving away from the language of parochial nationalism in search of the storylines lost

⁶⁹The growing postcolonial dilemma of the Nehruvian state post-1970s and the havoc caused in the Indian society by the ‘Mandal-Mandir-Masjid’ situations resulted in the changing notions regarding the definitions of a nation-state. Within the discipline of history itself, the notion of ‘history from below,’ as exemplified by the Subaltern Collective and subsequent works by feminists, revisited 1947 from new and marginal perspectives. This shift has been reflected in Partition historiography as well.

⁷⁰The collection managed to include only a single writer from the southern part of the subcontinent, Lalithambika Antharjanam, highlighting the significant lack of voices from these regions in the discussions of Partition.

in the sturdy brightness of Independence and the clamour of national pride, he turned the focus towards Partition's literary imaginings.

Most of the available histories of the partition, written either as accounts of victory or as nightmares, are constructed in the form of 'compelling narratives' concerned with the metaphysical identities of different communities and their collective fate rather than with the everyday selves of people and their acts in profane time (Bhalla 1999, 3120).

According to him, fictional accounts often strive to connect people's suffering and their social and cultural lives. For instance, Rahi Masoom Raza's novel written in Hindi, *Adha Gaon* (1966), which is translated as *A Village Divided* (2003), depicts the way individual relationships are complicated in relation to the chaos in society.⁷¹ Bhalla argues,

these fictional accounts, unlike narratives of the historians which move with certitude towards a definite end, contain all that is locally contingent and truthfully remembered, capricious and anecdotal, contradictory and mythically given. Their endings too are various. While some manage to find their way out of the realms of madness and crime, others either mark out the emotional and ethical map of our times with indelible lines of screams, ash, smoke and mockery, or crumble into shocked silence (1999, 3120).

According to Mushirul Hasan, the intellectual resources made available to us by Partition literature are significant in rewriting these 'histories', which have far-reaching consequences in our definitions of being a nation (Hasan 1998, 2667). In his observation, they highlight the unavailability of diverse narratives on the formation of the Indian nation-state, compelling the scholars to "explore fresh themes and adopt new approaches that have eluded the grasp of social scientists" (1998, 2667). It will further develop an alternative discourse to existing expositions of a general theory on inter-community relations (2667). These writers attempt to create a vision of Partition where the grim and sordid contemporary reality is

⁷¹The novel set during the 1940s in Gangauli village of the Awadh region explores the rivalry within a Zamindar family following Partition and the resultant fall of the Zamindari system. See Raza (2003).

represented without drawing on religion or a particular community as the principal reference point.

However, the perceptions about the contributions of literary narratives on Partition have revealed different standpoints. They have often considered the counter-narratives to the objectivity and rationality of history by bringing in the ‘human’ side of emotions, trauma, and fears (Talbot 2007). These stories are often read as peoples’ narratives where the official account primarily represented a statist disposition. Literature, in this perception, becomes the site of ‘impact’ where history is predominantly about the ‘causes.’ The emphasis on the literary quotient has, at times, separated the literary narratives from the official records by reinforcing the former’s ‘humanist’ ideals and universal appeal (Talbot 2007). The complementary relationship between literature and history is significant in understanding the importance of literary narratives in the conceptualisations of Partition. However, “personal experience in this context is conceived as universal, transparent, and outside language, culture and ironically history” (Didur 2006, 45). This urge for the contextually divergent ‘universal’ can be one of the many ways to bring together all those narratives that address Partition from different languages, locations and standpoints under the rubric of ‘Partition Literature.’ The narratives selected for the present study also exhibit the aspirations for these universal elements intrinsic to human existence.

However, Jill Didur disapproves of this conception of literature as an alternative discourse on Partition. In her book, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (2006), Didur discusses the ways in which literary works are also “enrolled in the production of nationalist imaginaries, as well as how they subvert and rewrite them” (Didur 2006, 20). An approach to Partition through literature, she writes, “points to a more contingent and polyphonic reading of national identity” where each writer locates herself within particular socio-cultural contexts (2006, 6). She addresses the question of how historians consider

literature as documents that will ‘complete’ our Partition knowledge. For her, such a perspective elides the fragmentariness and particularity of texts, and fails to recognise that literary representations are not “confessional chronicles of emotional trauma,” but are “interested commentaries” on historical events (Didur 2006, 48). Jill Didur disapproves the inclusion of literary narratives as “a means of filling gaps or supplementing the existing historical research rather than considering how these excerpts might destabilise the concept of representation in this scholarship as a whole” (47). In such an analysis, “the questions about the constructed nature of experience, how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured, about language (and discourse), about history- are left aside” (Scott 1991, 777).

Following the argument of Didur, I endeavour to read the selected narratives as ‘critical reflections’ on Partition, as they simultaneously occupy the vacant realm of the southern perception of Partition both as historical and literary documents. As Didur argues:

The inclusion of literary narratives in historiography is not seen as a way of presenting a more ‘authentic’ or personal view of a particular historical moment, but, instead, as providing the opportunity to examine ‘creative reappropriations of the conditions of daily life’ with an explicit attention to the double vision of text and context (2006, 56).

Thus, various viewpoints have brought in the diverse ways in which literary narratives have expanded the Partition archives. As varied in terms of time, languages, themes, genres, and ideologies, these literary narratives contribute to Partition’s varied meanings and understandings. However, all these perspectives unanimously corroborate the importance of including the literary narratives into the explorations of Partition to bring about the heterogeneity and contingencies in contexts, experiences and impacts. It is from these propositions that the chapter analyses the selected Partition narratives in Malayalam. The chapter locates the far-reaching impact of the historical event on the selected text in many ways. I endeavour to analyse the role of literature in producing a counter or parallel narrative to

history where these Malayalam narratives, though a ‘fictive’ testimony to the event, represent the fragments often ignored in its historiography. Drawing on Jill Didur’s argument, the chapter considers literature as not only the chronicles of human suffering but also as the politically and socially motivated, contextually contingent portrayals of those times.

II. Reading the Selected Texts as Partition Narratives in Malayalam

It might be rather ambitious to claim a vast category called Partition narratives in Malayalam literature compared to its massive repertoire in languages like Urdu and Hindi. However, the impact of the event and its continuing influences have been evident in the literary arena of Malayalam in the form of several works that address the theme of Partition, reflecting over the questions of nationalism, religious identities and inter-religious coexistence. Such narratives engage with these histories not necessarily as central themes but as an obvious juncture that cannot be easily avoided in the political turmoil of the period. From such narratives, selected texts that address Partition thematically and structurally in detail will be discussed in this section of the chapter.⁷² The section attempts to read these texts as Partition narratives by analysing the common tropes, motifs and themes that are cardinal in comprehending the meanings of Partition in a vernacular context.

As pointed out already, literary modernism in Malayalam during the first half of the twentieth century has been dominated by the Progressive Writers Movement, significantly marked by social realism. The movement brought home a revolutionary vigour and realistic interpretations of life to the Malayalam literature of the period (Namboodiripad 1984, 8). These

⁷²In Malayalam literature, it is possible to identify several works that discuss the themes of the nationalist movement, communal violence, and inter-community relations. For detailed discussions on the writings on these themes, see Achyuthan (2003); George (2009). However, due to the limited ambit of the present study, the chapter focuses only on the selected works from the Progressive Writers’ Movement in Malayalam, avoiding many other significant literary works.

writings underscored the undeniable relationship between society and literature. Drawing on the ideologies of the national movement, common (wo)men and their day-to-day lives became the central themes of these narratives (Gopalakrishnan 1987, 3). However, the movement's pioneering stakeholders in the region, especially the literary trio—Thakazhi, Kesavadev and Basheer—narrated stories woven into the social and political history of Kerala of that period.

Kesavadev's⁷³ novel *Bhranthalayam* [Mental Asylum], published in 1949, soon after independence, presents the growing religious intolerance in society due to the imminent influence of the subcontinent's bifurcation on religious basis when the images and memories of the period were fresh. Following the tradition of Partition literature in languages like Urdu and Hindi, the narrative emerges from the personalised, domestic spaces in an attempt to engage with the event in different realms of life—personal, religious, political—where all these spheres are interconnected, mapping out the various ways in which historical processes have been interpreted in the lives of the people.

The story centres on Abdu, a young Muslim man in a village in Kerala who is overtly religious. The narration progresses through his world views, associations, choices and experiences where his religiosity and pro-Pakistan spirit drastically change his life and those around him. The story revolves around two families. One of Abdu and Rahim and the other of Jameela and her adopted sister, Thatha. Abdu and Rahim are the sons of an affluent Muslim businessman in a village in Kerala who is plunged into bankruptcy due to his extravagant ways. Jameela and Thatha, having lost their hard-working father during their childhood, live with

⁷³P. Kesavadev (1904–1983), writer and social activist, occupies a central position in PWA for his portrayal of Kerala's socio-political scenario while envisioning a social purpose for literature. His compelling narratives depict the social and economic predicaments of contemporary society. Proletarian themes and working-class heroes populate his stories of social injustices and economic exploitation. His acclaimed novel *Odaiyil Ninnu* [From the Gutter, 1942] narrates life experiences from the lower strata of society. *Ayalkkar* [Neighbours, 1963] depicts realist portrayals of the fading feudal aristocracy and its final decline and downfall. His works manifest a peculiar sensitivity to the corresponding socio-political changes, as evidenced in his *Ayalkkar*, which depicts the altering positions of Ezhavas⁷³ and Christians as an upcoming middle class in a declining feudal society of Kerala (Chandrasekharan 1999, Raveendran and Jayasree 2017, 68-69).

their mother, anchoring their life around their home and doing intense labour. The two brothers, poles apart in temperament and worldview, are dramatically drawn into the sisters' lives. The nationalist movement, the demand for Pakistan and the consequent political and social turmoil not only creates a severe impact upon the lives of the characters but also serve as the backdrop of the story. Abdu is drawn to the idea of Pakistan and the consequences of his personal decision, which is implicit in the historical decision of Partition, becomes the course of the story.

Uroob's⁷⁴ *Amina*, published in 1948, contextualises the communal rifts and violence of the period by narrating the lives of two childhood friends, Dr. Nair and Hamid, and the eponymous character Amina. While presenting a world redolent with the intense emotions of love, loss, death, rape and violence, the novel also depicts the lives of people who are suddenly confined to their religious identities. Through Hamid's troubled memories, the novel portrays Pakistan as a failed (religious) project whose anticipation and accomplishments had created only ruins.

Kesavadev's own short story "Gusthi" [Wrestling], published in 1962, deals with a trivial contention between Hindus and Muslims at a tea shop in a small town in Kerala. The discussions over an upcoming wrestling match led to an infuriating dispute over the wrestlers' religious identities. The looming presence of Partition and the resultant religious intolerance in society in its aftermath becomes the backdrop of the story. It presents Partition as a moment of aberration or irrationality. The story also seems oblivious about any historical or social purpose behind the sudden eruption of violence.

⁷⁴Uroob alias P. C. Kutiikrishnan (1915- 1979), the novelist and short-story writer, is one of the pioneers of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Malayalam literature. His famous works include *Sundarikalum Sundaranmaarum* (The Beautiful and the Handsome 1958), *Ummachu* (1954). His works are characterised by the depictions of a humanistic way of life and a deep sense of history, as evidenced in *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum*, which chronicles the social change in Malabar around the historical processes of the Malabar Rebellion, Indian nationalist Movement and the Khilafat Movement (Raveendran and Jayasree 2017, 107- 108). For a detailed discussion on Uroob, see Nair (2014); Tharakan (1986).

Thakazhi Sivashankara Pillai's⁷⁵ "Gandhijiyude Anthyam" [The Death of Gandhi 1950] throws light on the lives of the survivors of Partition riots. The survivors are set on a journey from west Punjab that has become a part of Pakistan, in search of a prosperous life that the new nation has promised. The story uses Gandhi to symbolise the promise of love, tolerance and communal harmony, which the new nation-states failed to fulfil. The story conveys the paradox of the bloodbath and poverty that accompanied the Independence. It presents Gandhi as a human God employed by the national elites to manipulate the masses. The story ends with Gandhi's assassination that metaphorically suggests the beginning of a new era marked by the death of the ideals attributed to the promised nation.

The story, "Dhirendu Muzumdarinte Amma" [Mother of Dhirendu Muzumdar], written by Lalithambika Antharjanam,⁷⁶ is set in Bengal and revolves around the life of Shantanu Muzumdar, who is a refugee in one of the rehabilitation camps in Bengal (2003a). She discredits the differences based on religion and considers Bengali identity above all other identity markers. Interestingly, she identifies herself and the rest as Bengalis and not as Indians. In this way, Antharjanam shows how the nation's more significant debates and politics gain no significance in its margins. Nevertheless, Antharjanam, a Malayalam-speaking, upper-caste woman writer from the southern region of the subcontinent, engages with the theme of Partition, negating its possibilities of being an exclusive northern debate. The story reveals its impacts, reverberations and discussions that extend beyond those regions. However, the story is placed in north India, distancing the physical experiences of Partition. Involving the political figures of the time, "Dhirendu Muzumdarinte Amma," "holds up to scrutiny the divisive

⁷⁵Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912- 1999), widely known as Thakazhi, is a famous novelist and short story writer in Malayalam known for the portrayal of the oppressed classes and their issues. He was a prolific writer, and his major works include *Thottiyude Makan* [Scavenger's Son 1947], *Randidangazhi* [Two Measures 1948], *Kayar* [Cair 1978], etc. He is part of the literary trio along with Kesavadev and Basheer, and pioneered the PWM in Malayalam literature. See, Panicker (1992); Menon (1962).

⁷⁶Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909- 1989) is one of the prominent women writers and social reformers in Kerala. Her writings express sensitivity to the issues of women and belongs to the first generation of feminist intellectuals in Kerala. For a detailed discussion on her narrative realm, see Devika (2017); Leelavathy (1969).

politics of Partition and the leaders who were instrumental in executing them” (Akhtar 2013, 15). Antharjanam’s portrayal of Partition and the women’s question involved are often considered part of the women’s intervention in Partition’s politics. It can also be considered part of understanding how the horrors were inflicted upon women’s lives.⁷⁷ Her widely translated short story, “Kodumkatilpeta Orila” [A Leaf Caught in a Hurricane] narrates the story of a pregnant woman in a refugee camp (2003b). The young woman, haunted by the horrors of the Partition violence, is traumatised by the realisation of the child being the product of violence meted upon her. In the moving story, the girl’s predicament mirrors that of the nation, which portrays the significant juncture in the nation’s history in a horrendous nature, often unfathomable.⁷⁸

Partition’s discursive realm is depicted in these narratives through themes, tropes and images recurrent in the fictional depictions of the subcontinent’s bifurcation. In the attempt to analyse the selected texts as Partition narratives in Malayalam, specific themes and tropes are closely scrutinised as they are regarded as central to the historical significance of Partition in defining the ‘nation.’ Alok Bhalla in his anthology of Partition stories has managed to discern a number of stories which portrayed the truth(s) about Partition (1994). Such an effort has enabled him to identify scores of characteristics in terms of structural and thematic elements that are common to these stories.

The first is that they either assume the existence of a communally shared history in pre-partition India, or imaginatively set up, with the help of small remembered things, images of the subcontinent as a place of tolerant communities as structural counterpoints to the dispirited sense of exile and pain after the division (Bhalla 1999, 3120).

⁷⁷Kannada writer Savithramma (1913- 1995) also wrote short stories on the plight of women during Partition (1949). Nikhila H., in her analysis on the same, perceives it as an empathetic, women-centric intervention in the politics of Partition and the nationalist movement. (Nikhila 2014, 59-71).

⁷⁸Both the stories are included in the anthology of Partition stories compiled by Alok Bhalla (1994). Interestingly, Antharjanam is the only writer from the southern part of India included in the collection.

A close reading of the selected texts reveals that the life in these imaginative worlds assumes a shared cultural heritage for both Hindus and Muslims. In *Bhranthalayam*, Kesavadev portrays a society with a shared past of togetherness. The instances and images that recall those moments of harmony and tolerance, shaken by the growing religious antagonism, are highlighted in the narrative. The novel presents several instances where characters recall the fast-disappearing camaraderie between Hindus and Muslims. During the quarrel that takes place in the market between Abdu and Rahim's friends, the old man, Kittan exclaims, "Oh God, I had to see this too! These things never happened here.... These things never happened in this place in our times and our ancestor's!"⁷⁹ (Kesavadev 2012, 12).

In these ideas of a shared past and collective life, the socialist in Kesavadev identifies the nation's moorings. The syncretic past becomes the cultural ideal that the post-independent nation should inherit. When Kesavadev was writing these stories between 1940 and 1950, the new nation-region had just been established. A nation-community not based on caste, religion, language or province but including all of them had to be imagined for which new social relations also had to be worked out. As the text's primary concern is the weakening of communal harmony, he initiates (re)-imagining a society grounded on peaceful co-existence. Furthermore, this vision delegitimises the territorial imaginations within the nation based on religion or caste. Thus, the invocation of a nostalgic past, characterised by communal harmony, carries in its undertones an image of the nation itself built on the principle of equality, bereft of social injustice and communal frenzy. In Kerala's cultural context, as mentioned before, the image of a shared past receives the historical advantage of various communities living in symbiosis (Narayanan 1972). It also reverberates the cultural ideation of *Mavelinadu* which has a significant role in the 'exceptional' social imagination of the region as a (sub)national entity (Jeffrey 1992; Mannathukkaren 2016).

⁷⁹Unless otherwise specified, all translations from select literary works are mine.

However, the preoccupation with an ideal past should not be directed to the conclusion that the fictional works on Partition imagine pre-independence India as an exemplar of communal harmony. The selected texts do not share the perception that relations between different religious groups were always devoid of mutual friction. Rather, contestations between communities are seen as part of a politically vibrant society like Kerala, where marketplaces, village tea shops and public libraries always witnessed debates and discussions characteristic of a modern political society (Menon 1994a, 145). Though Kesavadev addresses the rising religious discord in society during nation-formation by contrasting it with the harmonious past, his attempt fails to develop into a direct critique of the nationalist project by exploring the complexities involved in the idea of communalism. His position as a social realist writer compels him to probe into the ‘individual’ and their experiences rather than the broader problematic of communalism. Moreover, caste has been a more visible political category in Kerala, where communities are prominently defined based on caste markers. It remains one of the important criteria for social and political mobilisation, keeping the religious consolidations in the region in check and prohibiting the communal tendencies to thrive.⁸⁰ The selected works seldom narrate Partition as an inevitable consequence of an ancient hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. Indeed, the stories find hardly any historical or social reason behind the separation and the massacres. The fictional writings about this period often expressed people’s bewilderment while facing the magnitude of violence. The literary imagination addresses the politics and trauma of Partition through wonder, anguish and helplessness.

In the literary narratives, the violence of an unprecedented magnitude is the most invoked memory and history associated with Partition, which characterises the present and distinguishes it from the syncretic past. Though geographically distant from the physical

⁸⁰How the category of caste determines the inter-community relations in Kerala has been discussed in Mathew (1989), Chiriyankandath (1993), Devika and Varghese (2010).

violence unleashed during Partition, the narratives in Malayalam focused on this theme considerably. The narratives abound with images of blood, corpses, mutilated bodies, and rape scenes recreating the horrors of the Partition violence. The image of the north is the nerve centre of that violence. In *Amina*, during their travel from eastern Bengal, Hamid and Amina witness the horrors of the Partition violence in which Amina eventually gets killed (Uroob 2006, 3). The violence depicted in these narratives is heart-wrenching, and it portrays how people have been reduced to their religious identities.

I haven't seen this much blood ever in my life, Doctor! In fact, nobody would have seen it. There was blood everywhere- of Muslims and Hindus... What a sight was it, Doctor? Those decapitated bodies... Were those of Hindus or Muslims? (Uroob 2006, 4).

One part of dealing with the violence was portraying all the murders, rapes and abductions during Partition as examples of collective madness. The novel's title, 'Bhranthalam', meaning 'mental asylum', conceives Partition as a moment in Indian history when the entire Indian subcontinent was transformed into a mental asylum. The novel also uses several instances, terms and images to present Partition as a moment of irrationality and insanity. When the author-narrator describes the growing religious intolerance in the society, he uses statements like "intelligence was lost and like a dry leaf, was taken away by the wind" (Kesavadev 2012, 35). In *Bhranthalam*, Pathumma and Jaleema always interpret the religious fury and the spirit for Pakistan in Abdu as symptoms of a(n) (mental) 'illness' (Kesavadev 2012, 97).

The writers have incorporated the trope of madness as a method of making sense of the calamities during Partition. The acclaimed story "Toba Tek Singh" (Manto 1994) characterises the inmates of a mental asylum in Lahore. The narrative depicts the exchange of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu occupants between India and Pakistan a few years after the initial fury of Partition has died down. Unlike Kesavadev, Manto presents madness as the realisation of the futility of

a division along religious lines. While Kesavadev perceives Partition as an insane moment in our history when society had gone mad, Manto considers insanity as the only way to make sense of the situation. The Malayalam movie on Partition migrants, *Paradesi* (2007)⁸¹ also presents an ‘insane’ character, Abdu Rahman, who seems to recognise the political machinations behind the rationality of Partition. The movie capitalises on Abdu Rahman’s insane prattling in order to present its political opinion. Like Manto, P.T. Kunju Muhammad, the director of *Paradesi*, often indicates that only insanity can make sense of the loopholes in the nationalist project. The nation’s critique is often expressed in these mad utterings highlighting their marginality or aberrancy within the normalcy of the nation.

However, in Kesavadev, this method of labelling the unimaginable magnitude of violence that characterised Partition as madness can be assumed as a measure of reconciliation with the way the nation was born while persevering the hopes for a better future. Thomas Palakeel, in his analysis of “Gusthi,” argues:

In the final moments in “Gusthy,” when the younger survivors decide to forget the inexplicable “madness” and move on, the call for the erasure of memory comes in the form of a signboard prohibiting “madmen” from entering their new teashop. Indeed, the signboard seems to signify not only the utter folly of the slaughter, but also an uneasy tendency to pathologize history and declare collective helplessness to the extent of writing it (off) as “madness” (2001, 323).

The communal riots which were taking place in different parts of north India are referred to in the text as instances of madness. In this regard, the accusation made by Pandey (1991) against the official histories of Partition can be raised against Kesavadev as well. These official

⁸¹The film *Paradesi* (2007), written and directed by P.T. Kunju Muhammed, addresses the issues of Partition by portraying the lives of ‘Pakistani’ citizens in Malabar. The film represents the dilemmas of Indian citizens who become aliens in their own birthplace. Long before independence, they had gone from their native places to a distant part of India seeking jobs, but suddenly their workplace became Pakistan. On their return to their own homeland, they are treated as foreigners because they now hold Pakistani passports. The film attempts a negotiation with the concept of ‘citizen’ by exploring new definitions of the ‘native’ and the ‘foreigner.’ The film is analysed in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

narratives have often considered these violent moments in the nation's history as aberrations or abnormalities (Pandey 1991, 560). This way of condemning the event as irrational can be considered an attempt to deny the event of its centrality in the nation-making process. Such dissociation from Partition's history can be interpreted as a liberal impulse typical of the socialist ideologues.

For the writer, during this 'abnormal' temporality created during Partition, the characters' religious identities are highlighted rather than their status as mere human beings. However, through the ordeal of violence, they are 'sanitised' of their religiosity and elevated to the stature of 'Human.'⁸² In *Amina*, Hamid repeatedly asks Dr. Nair, while describing the moments of violence, whether all the dead bodies which are left behind must be of Hindus or Muslims'? (Uroob 2006, 4; 6). Most often, the literary narratives are interwoven with the ideas of peace and humanism. However, by going beyond a humanist condemnation of violence, the way these narratives negotiate the workings of the nation and the repercussions of Partition is of central importance. The supreme identity constantly invoked with the nation is that of the 'human.' Writers of social realism constantly establish 'humanism'⁸³ as the sole religion to be foregrounded in the emerging nation devoid of any ethnical markers of caste, religion or creed (Ramakrishnan 2005). For this purpose, one has to come out of the shackles of religion or caste to be the rightful citizens of the nation. Uroob's *Amina* begins with a prologue which is in the form of dedication for *Pachamanushyar* [impeccable human beings] which is as follows:

They all were born here, as impeccable beings, revealing the glory of creation.
They could catch a breath of petrichor, before being coerced into the dark
corridors of faith. They had to scrap by in the hamlets of Peshawar and Noakhali

⁸²M. T Ansari argues that "humanising" the Muslim subject has been a colonial agenda that has to be continued in the nationalist project (2016, 81). According to him, the portrayal of Muslim subject as an almost inhuman being has been frequent in the literary modernity in Malayalam during the nineteenth and twentieth century (2016, 164).

⁸³As a philosophical stance, humanism puts forward the importance of the individual at the centre of philosophical enquiries. Humanism has been identified as a defining principle in the nineteenth century Renaissance. In literature, Romanticism has ushered in a new wave of humanist ideology placing the individual at the centre of society.

and thousands other villages. Those villages never partook in elections, instead they toiled away (Uroob 2006, 1).

Violence being the deviation from the core values of modernity, the reiteration of the principle of humanism has been characteristic of the Partition narratives (Hasan 2002, 33). The writers perceive it as the only code of resistance during such horrific times as that of Partition. The authors seem to share the belief that the value of humanism eroded during such violent times. According to them, the humanistic way of looking at life differentiates our times from our ancestors,' often expressed while recalling the syncretic past. Baffled at the polarisation of religious identities witnessed during the period, the principle of humanism characterises the nostalgic past that they often contemplate. Kesavadev also seems to be following the method of recalling the lost ideal of humanism. In the novel *Pachu Panikkar*, the old man who hardly interferes in the debates over the Germans and the British, says, “[a]ll of them are determined to go around and kill people. The only thing we have to do is punish them all” (Kesavadev 2012, 7). Kesavadev asserts humanism as that quality to hold on to even during the awful times of our lives. He reminds us through the novel that “India, that believed in humanism even when the subcontinent was drowned in slavery and poverty, now began to dance with the thirst for blood. India has become a mental asylum...” (Kesavadev 2012, 37). Kesavadev, being a writer who was concerned with the questions of class- caste politics, emphasises the idea of ‘humanism’ as a vital part of imagining a nation. ‘The Human’ as an idea figure in the writings of Kesavadev’s contemporaries too. For instance, in the writings of Basheer, Lalithambika Antharjanam, two of the prominent writers of social realism in Malayalam literature, the category of ‘the human’ appears above all other political or social entities (Ramakrishnan 2005). However, it can also be considered an uncritical humanism that concentrates only on the pain and sorrow of human suffering, restricting our conceptions of the political and civic fault-lines inherent in the nation project.

Due to its obvious Left leanings, the social realism in Malayalam literature has repeatedly invoked Socialist ideologies in their stories against the injustices in society (Raveendran and Jayasree 15). Such involvement has often expressed a visible class consciousness in their works where the ‘human,’ more exclusively, the ‘common man’ emerged as the central figure. Kesavadev, belonging to the tradition, would never ignore the economic and social anxieties surrounding Partition. In *Bhranthalayam*, the tensions developed in the society as the novel progresses are often not the result of religious intolerance but financial vulnerability. In the Marxian understanding of communalism, economic and material deprivation instigates communal and separatist tendencies.⁸⁴ The novel presents several instances where an economic crisis leads to mutual misunderstandings and conflicts. For example, the mishap in business turn Ummarukutti Muthalali against his son Rahim. The author’s attempts to bring out the economic dimensions of Partition have been instrumental in bringing forth the concerns at the heart of Kerala society. Even during the peak years of India’s freedom struggle, what seem to be the fundamental problems of Kerala, as they are presented in the novel, are those that spring from economic inequality. The character Neelakanda Pilla encourages political debates for his monetary benefits (Kesavadev 2012, 38), and Abdu’s brother-in-law, prefers his livelihood to the debates over Hindustan and Pakistan (2012, 45). They represent the economic anxieties of a postcolonial nation that will come into being once the ‘madness’ has passed. Abdu’s brother-in-law’s words are very pertinent in this regard. He says, “these things will not be encouraged here. Those who want to preach can go outside- I need neither Pakistan nor Hindustan. I am a merchant. Got it?” (Kesavadev 2012, 45) He also says,

remember that violence is not the monopoly of anybody! Even if Gandhi is great or Jinnah is important, I have to work so that my family survives.... This place

⁸⁴How the skewing economic condition of the society triggered communal tensions in the Indian context has been an argument put forward, especially by Marxist historians like Bipan Chandra (2007). For a similar approach to inter-religious conflicts during the Malabar Rebellion, see Panikkar (1989).

is meant for business. If you quarrel here in the name of Pakistan and Hindustan, I will throw everyone out (Kesavadev 2012, 46).

Such anxieties shared by the characters indicate the author's emphasis on economic security as an essential axiom on which the emerging nation must be anchored. Thus, these writings are contingent with the nation's destiny for the development and wellbeing of everyone, which is the Nehruvian vision for the postcolonial nation and the framework on which the Kerala model emerged.

The Partition studies, for very long, has been caught up in the essentialist narrative of communalism where the religious identities of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were the only parameters to analyse the vivisection of the society. In this framework, the population is divided into Hindus and Muslims, where the divisive binary of majority-minority is formulated, haunting the Muslim belonging in the country (Devji 1992). Though the selected narratives attempt to disown the event, they portray the identities involved in the violence as quintessentially Hindu and Muslim. Interestingly, the identities trapped in the swirl of violence are inexplicably Muslim for these writers. It is Amina who gets killed as she accompanies her husband's journey (Uroob 2006). What one can construe from the repeated victimisation of these Muslim characters is the essentiality of their Muslim/ minor status, which is often held responsible for their tragic predicament even in the distant imaginations of Partition. The victimisation of the Muslim identities throws light on their marginalised existence since Partition within the nation's secular fabric (Devji 1992).

It is quite evident how minor identities like that of being a woman are sidelined as much as Muslim identities are marginalised within the idea of a nation. Amina, irrespective of being the eponymous character, is trapped in the choices made around her by others. As Dr. Nair decides to leave without a reply, she is made part of Hamid's life. His choice to find livelihood in the north-eastern part of the subcontinent brings her amidst Partition violence. As mentioned in the narratives, the leaders' political choices led to the Partition of the subcontinent. It

eventually leads to the riots in which Amina is killed, an act dictated by the men involved in the riots, upon the woman's body which according to them lacks any sort of agency. Amina, in many ways, is a representative of the minor identities like women thrust into the story of the Partition. It has also to be pointed out that, in the entirety of the narrative, each man and woman who is dragged into the vortex of Partition are conscripted against their wish and have no stake in the story. It also corresponds to Partition as a high political drama as it is portrayed in its literary representations where the ordinary people have no agency other than being the victims of these contexts.

While exploring the themes of nation and community, the question of representation regarding the minor subject is crucial. Though representation remains a significant concern while analysing Partition narratives in relation to the ways in which the minor subject is figured in these narratives, I specifically look for the themes of nation and community and the Hindu-Muslim subjectivities marked within these structures. In the novel *Amina*, I argue, Amina herself symbolises the conception of Pakistan, an idea of inscribing the nation on a religious identity. On a passionate romantic note, the novel narrates the story of unfulfilled love between Amina and Dr. Nair and her tragic death in the Partition riots after her marriage to Hamid. When her affection for Dr. Nair implies belongingness to one's locality/ region, her marriage to Hamid represents an alliance based on religion, resulting in her tragic death. Hamid himself holds this view when he says, "it is her decision to marry me that ruined everything" (14). Thus, Dr. Nair symbolises the nation to which one belongs by blood and soil.

Bhranthalayam narrates how the movement for Pakistan alters even the course of the national movement as it gets religiously divided. The demand for Pakistan unsettles society and distances the nationalist movement from the masses as it turns to satiating the elite's whims and fancies. In Kesavadev's critical appraisal of elite nationalism, he perceives the movement

for Pakistan as an elite affair to counter the Hindutva ideology of the upper-class nationalists.

As the narrator says:

On the one side, such Muslims who cried- ‘Islam in danger’ – intending to acquire the right to exploit and attack the common Muslim folk; and on the other side, affluent Hindus, who masked behind Nationalism, swirled the tempest blowing the trumpet of war, reminding a period that existed several years ago (Kesavadev 2012, 37).

Abdu, one of the central characters in the novel, *Bhranthalayam*, is an ardent supporter of the movement for Pakistan. His support for a new Islamic nation is justified in terms of his intense religiosity. As Devji (2013) and Dhulipala (2015) elaborated on the religious and political conceptions of Pakistan, Abdu imagines a Promised Land where he would receive prosperity and happiness.⁸⁵

That green flag arrived at a heavenly city, rushing through date palm gardens, vineyards and golden paddy fields. Ornamented, gold plated mansions and streets covered in gold dust. Gardens, streams and the heavenly beauties singing...! Abdu cried out in joy, Pakistan, Pakistan! (Kesavadev 2012, 107).

The solidarity in terms of religion implies the politics of pan-Islamism, which has been utilised in mobilising the Mappilas of Malabar during the Khilafat Movement culminating in the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. It also problematises the national loyalty of overtly religious Muslims as nation’s prospective citizens.

As the Muslim identity is problematised in the narratives of Partition, the trope of belonging has been a pertinent question, especially for the minority communities. It has remained one of the major themes in Partition narratives across the national borders, genres and disciplines. In the *Malayalee* depictions of Partition, the friction between the subaltern/ regional/ ethnic identity and the national identity brings in the question of belonging. The sense of place is central to many of the Partition narratives (Kumar 2019). It validates the significance

⁸⁵How the religious conception of the nation resulted in the political imagination of the nation-state of Pakistan is elaborately discussed by Devji (2013) and Dhulipala (2015).

of displacement and dislocation they have experienced during Partition. The eponymous character in Manto's famous story, "Toba Tek Singh" shares a deep connection with the place. As the surname in Punjab usually comes from their *pind* or ancestral village, his identity is seen merged with his native place. According to Sukrita Paul Kumar,

it is an example of the complete identification of the person with the place to which he belonged. Partition severed this relationship physically, but this also led to the psychological bond getting even stronger. It is the lingering connection that literature centred on Partition explores repeatedly (2019).

The selected narratives also portray how the sense of being is intrinsically connected to the location and how the nationalist vision pushes one to extend this vision's panorama to nationhood. However, Lalithambika Antharjanam's stories emphatically picturise this untimely breakage of one's affiliation with the place. It denies the individual of one of her central identities, leaving them in a constant state of non-belongingness. Thus, through her stories, Antharjanam initiates the *Malayalee* discussion on Partition in the domain of refugee question. Her stories, "Dhirendu Muzumdarinte Amma" and "Kodumkatil petta Ila" poignantly depict the conditions of homelessness in the new nation. One of the inconceivable but grim realities that Partition left behind is the plight of the millions who travelled across newly created borders amidst angst and violence. The refugee figure is portrayed through the central tropes- loss, despair, suffering, and disillusionment- identified as the recurring motifs in the Partition narratives. There is severe anguish evident in these refugee characters over the way independence and the birth of nation-state have transpired for them. As one of the pioneering figures of the tradition of Social Realism, the writer is hinting at the feeling of empathy being the sole basis of a collective living for the new nation. As the older ways in which various communities coexisted in the region have severely been tampered with, only the mutual feeling of empathy based on a strong sense of humanity can take the society forward.

Besides Anthajanam's narratives, the old man in T. Padmanabhan's⁸⁶ story, "Abhayarthiyude Swapnangal" [The dreams of Refugee 1959], discusses the paradox in the celebrations of India's independence and the enormous number of refugees formed in the aftermath of Partition. His sense of nation is shaped by the horrors he has experienced, the loss he has suffered, and the memories sustained in his heart. The over-sentimentality alleged in the Partition literature is explicitly expressed in these narratives as the refugee recalls his hardships. It can also be considered that the writers make sense of those turbulent times in the universal language of suffering through which the renewed ways of endearment and cohabitation are sought. Similarly, in the story "Makhansinghinte Maranam" [The Death of Makhan Singh 1958] by T. Padmanabhan, the protagonist's empathy for the refugees from Punjab, which has become part of Pakistan after Partition, is shown as the only hope which remains for the nation to survive after those turbulent times. While Kesavadev and Thakazhi were the products of the national movement, T. Padmanabhan belonged to the generation of writers who experienced the dilemmas of the postcolonial state in its later years (Mohamed 1993, 183). The characters were disillusioned and introspective who expressed the post-independent dilemmas constituted by the Partition (183).

The Partition narratives in Malayalam abound with such common tropes, metaphors and images associated with Partition. The selected narratives make Partition and the emerging nation legible for a *Malayalee* readership by employing these tropes to recreate the contexts in which Partition has been imagined, identified and experienced for its erstwhile contexts of Kerala. The experience of Partition has been made available for the audience through a plausible image of the nation. In the narratives, the nation becomes the dominant collective

⁸⁶T. Padmanabhan (b. 1931) is a renowned short story writer in Malayalam. His major short story collections include *Prakasham Parathunna Penkutti* [The Girl Who Spreads Light 1955], *Makhansinghine Maranam* [The Death of Makhansingh 1958]. He belongs to the early 'modern' generation of short story writers who portrayed the 'individual in distress.' Though they appear simple, his stories are observed to be permeated with complex situations and characters' inner turmoil (Mohamed 1993).

imagined in terms of aspirations for a better tomorrow where the values of freedom, communal harmony and development are achieved. The stories portray the experiences of Partition as a moment of aberration to such imaginings of the nation and warn us of the ferociousness and madness which communal identities can generate. However, the narratives also express a deep nostalgia for one's region and local belonging. Maybe, the nation, in its vernacular imaginings, has to be identified along with a sense of identification with the sub-national identities. Kerala has always been successful in celebrating its regional identity of being *Malayalee* on par with its sense of being part of a nation. It has always tried to be vocal and proud of its regional nationalism, negotiating its importance along with the nationalist consciousness.

As it has been widely and repeatedly argued, the dominant tendency of the nationalist narrative, especially in the literary realm, was to present Partition as a betrayal and loss, which is reflected in these narratives of Partition in Malayalam as well. As has been identified with their Urdu and Hindi counterparts, their stories express emotional outbursts, bewilderment and bafflement towards the historic turn of events. Such emotionally poignant portrayals often critiqued for their overt sentimentality omitted the intricacies of how communities were defined and developed in the subcontinent (Didur 2006, 121). Often falling back on to the nostalgia of a syncretic past, these narratives tend to overlook the faultlines in nation-building and the complex ways in which communities are merged into it. There are no stringent rules for the thematic strategies or narrative frameworks with which the Progressive writers in Malayalam conceptualised the theme of Partition. Nevertheless, their stories are highly informed, shaped and constituted by the specific socio-political and cultural locations where they are situated and which they primarily intend to address. The vision imparted by these narratives is highly informed by the ideologies these writers seek the society to imbibe. The image or imagination of Partition constructed through these specific locations and ideologies will be discussed in the following sections of the chapter.

III. Partition and the Nation in Making

A reading of the selected Partition narratives in Malayalam, proves in multiple ways, the reiterations of the nationalist urgency to transform the Hindus and Muslims into Indians. In Kerala society, which is often identified as cultural, if not religious, it can be observed that the Hindu identity can easily be transcribed into the dominant cultural identity and, thus, into the ‘national’ (Arunima 2006b). The selected texts also adhere to this pattern in their depictions of Partition without addressing how we contextualise Muslim or other minority identities in the imaginings of the nation. Instead, the writers attempt to legitimise their identity by creating humane, righteous ‘citizens.’ Muslim characters, especially are made to realise the lack of salience of religion, and are made to pin their hopes exclusively on universal humanity. For example, Rahim in *Bhranthalayam* and Hamid in *Amina* are regretful towards the end of the narratives and express their hopes in ‘humanity’ rather than in religion.

There were no mishappening as we passed the following three stations. They were village areas. I opened the window of the train slowly and gazed outside. With fields on both sides, people were moving in the distance along the valley of a hill. There were small huts, here and there. Fields were being ploughed, and seeds were being sown. Cold breeze was coming from the fields. Men, women and children were working laboriously in the fields. Were there Hindus and Muslims among them? (Uroob 2006, 7).

The writers here, who belong to the early phase of the Progressive Writers Movement in Malayalam, are much in tune with the nationalist portrayal of the society. In the novel *Amina*, during Hamid and Amina’s perilous travels across eastern Bengal amidst Partition violence, an old Hindu man shelters them at his place. The author might be hinting at a peaceful coexistence for the nation to survive. However, there is a sense of responsibility being given to the majority community of Hindus for the realisation of this harmonious coexistence. Thus, Muslims are already earmarked as the community whose sense of belonging has to be explained in relation to the majority community which is evoked with a vivid sense of humanity.

Interestingly, many of the Partition narratives in Malayalam deviate in their ways of being either *staatsnationalistic* or *kulturnationalistic*.⁸⁷ As it has been already mentioned, while negotiating the partitioned mentalities of being ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim,’ they also imagine a new nation based on the humanistic principles of equality and egalitarianism. One should also note that the ‘nation’ imagined or indicated is not necessarily the national region of India. Most often, the narratives romanticise a collective devoid of the markers of differences like caste, religion and class. As part of formulating diverse prospects for the society, the character of Azees in *Bhranthalayam* provides a different perspective on the movement for Pakistan (Kesavadev 2012, 47). The indigent condition of his occupation drives him to consider Pakistan as a place of financial certainty. The desire for a promised land is a typical theme in the period’s literary writings (Achyuthan 160). For Azees, the promised land/ Pakistan is envisioned not based on religion but on economic security, which again contradicts the nationalist perceptions on Partition.

The idea of solidarity that figures in the social and political movements of the period becomes significant here. In a society where the caste-class consciousness was developing to fight the injustices faced by the people, solidarity in religion never gained significant momentum as it did in the north. The old man in *Amina*, for instance, exclaims over the confidence shown in him by Hamid and family irrespective of him being a Hindu. He emphasises the fact that “you have come from the *South*” (Uroob 2006, 9, emphasis added) as it is illustrative of the south (the southern part of the subcontinent) to have a syncretic coexistence irrespective of religious difference. Thus, the narratives attempt to derive an explicit differentiation in the ways communities coexist in both regions. The eulogy for the

⁸⁷Joe Cleary, in his analysis of the works of literature on Partition, brings in the concepts of *staatsnational* and *kulturnation* by the German scholar Friedrich Meinecke as the primary ways in which the nation-state and national culture come into existence. In a *staatsnational* situation, the state comes into existence before the establishment of national culture. Whereas in *kulturnational*, the development of national culture takes place much before forming the nation-state. However, according to Cleary, partitioned societies contradictorily exhibit both tendencies due to a shared past and a separate national identity (Cleary 2002, 58-59).

‘exceptional’ inter-community networks has been pertinent to the descriptions of the region (Nandy 2000; Varshney 2004). Moreover, the claim acts as a counter-narrative to the north-centrism of the national imagination in India, which also involves the cultural othering of the south in terms of linguistic, ethnic and other cultural differences. It can also be considered as an attempt to delineate a regionally specific society for Kerala based on syncretic coexistence, as it is the premise on which these Progressive writers imagined the nation/region.

Even in its distant imaginations, the political and social rupture that accompanied Partition and its aftermath made it impossible for these writers to be immune to those impacts. Thus, through these narratives, Partition is etched in the literary public sphere of Malayalam at that time, marking its position in the collective consciousness of being *Malayalee*. The socio-political scenario of Kerala witnessed various political, social and religious and also literary movements during the period. These movements have created a communitarian consciousness that made the imaginings of a nation feasible in many ways. The selected writers’ attempt to address the event and its consequences exhibit the concerns of a region striving to grapple with the changing political and social scenario in the post-Partition years. By locating particular historical events that gave specific definitions to community and nation, the texts imagine the nation in its own ways. Thus, Partition is figured in the selected narratives as part of defining a national community. The texts imagine a nation-community, which is not based on caste, religion, language or province, but including all of them for which new social relations had to be worked out. For the writers who belong to the tradition of social realism, imagining the nation was possible only in being ‘Human’ devoid of the ethnic identities of Hindu or Muslim. The nation envisioned in these texts imagines Pakistan in its religiosity, elite politics and violent origin, distant from the ‘secular’ spaces of India as a nation. Owing to this particular definition of Pakistan, the Muslim characters in the texts carry the burden of legitimising their identities in secular India. Though the nationalist politics in Kerala assumed the nature of caste-

class politics instead of revolving around the binary of Hindu/Muslim, the figure of Muslim is marginalised even in its proud narratives of reform and development.

The literary representations of Partition in Malayalam do not assume the burden of giving a historical explanation for the event or presenting it as a political necessity. Unlike the official accounts, these narratives have not dealt with the story of ‘political apologetics’ and are acknowledged for their induced effect of ‘partial catharsis’ in the readers (Palakeel 2001, 329). For instance, *Amina* presents the pointlessness of religion as reflected in Hamid’s words uttered in despair and disillusionment- “is it possible to avoid God??” (Uroob 2006, 11). Uroob is hinting at the incapability of religion to hold together people as citizens of the modern nation. The community which is imagined is transcendental of the ethnic ways of being a collective. They may be constituted by filial ways of friendship, courtship, neighbourhood, kindness, sympathy, empathy and humanity as is the case with Hamid and Dr. Nair, between their families, and Amina and Dr. Nair.

There were people before that also. There were many Nabis and religious scholars, and so did their preaching. Many have visited Mecca and Medina. Sufis sang immeasurably of the goodness of the world. People have even learnt it by heart. Then why would one kill a pregnant woman using an axe?⁸⁸ (Uroob 2006, 10).

Dr. Nair can indulge himself in the metaphysical questions on the nature of religion, which Hamid points out as his privilege. This privilege can be extended to the narrator and the writer and the context from which (s)he is writing, far from the physical manifestations of Partition. Hamid reminds him how the questions are not in a metaphysical realm for many who live in

⁸⁸The axe is considered auspicious especially by the Hindus of Kerala. According to the popular myth, the geographical region of present-day Kerala is retrieved from the water by the warrior sage in Mahabharata, Parasu Rama, the sixth human incarnation of Lord Vishnu, by throwing an axe into the ocean. Thus, citing the use of the axe for a heinous crime, the author contrasts the region's cultural heritage from where the new nation should inherit the values.

the reality of being dislocated, raped and murdered merely on the ground that they belong to a particular religion. Hamid reproaches to Dr. Nair thus:

What you are saying is not correct as you need not have to torment yourself with such thoughts. Neither your wife has been murdered, nor your child been mutilated in the name of God. You have not thought about it, Doctor! (Uroob 2006, 11).

It is interesting to note that the title given to Uroob's short novella is based on the eponymous character Amina, though the narrative progresses through the conversations and worldviews of the other two male protagonists, Dr. Nair and Hamid. In many ways, they represent the respective religious communities - Hindu and Muslim, as their names suggest. The character of Amina often symbolises the nation and its state of being a secular entity lost during the turmoil of Partition. The violence is fought in the name of the Hindus and the Muslims, benefiting none, neither Dr. Nair, Hamid nor the communities they represent. The novel's emotionally poignant climax scene depicts the reconciliation of the husband, Hamid, and the lover, Dr. Nair, with the loss of their beloved Amina. It represents the lament over the lost harmony and ways of cordiality between communities during Partition. This scene insinuates mutual acceptance and reconciliation in the wake and for the sake of the new nation. However, Uroob's rendering of Partition is problematised as one scrutinises the roles given to particular identities. By giving in to the nationalist logic of the Hindu majority as the torchbearer of the nation with its ideals of secularism and equality, minority identities like that of Muslims and women are victimised only to be accepted by an accommodating nation. The wounds of bifurcation are often made in their names or bodies, as is in the case with Amina.

Literary stalwarts in the later phase of the Progressive Writers Movement in Urdu mark their differences with a critical interference in the rubric of Partition

narratives.⁸⁹ They complicate the advocated ease and normalcy with which communities are portrayed as innately tolerant in the pre-Partition days, and which are suddenly infected with the frenzy called Partition. Instead, they look for the social mechanisms which sustained inter-community cohabitation, which Partition muddled. This complex reality of the process of nation-building, portrayed by Manto or Joginder Paul, is lacking in the Malayalam narratives on Partition.⁹⁰ Joginder Paul⁹¹, though often identified with Progressive Writers Movement in Urdu literature during its heyday, breaks away from its uncritical realist trends in order to capture the complex experiences during Partition. Paul's famous Urdu novella *Sleepwalkers* (1990), argues Amrita Ghosh, "shifts the dominant realist strain in the form and content of Urdu fiction to open a liminal "third space" which subverts the notion of hegemonic reality" (2019, 3). *Sleepwalkers* narrates the story of the community of *Mohajirs* who migrated from Lucknow, India, to Karachi in Pakistan as part of the massive migration during Partition.⁹² The author, with the extraordinary brilliance in his craft, depicts how the *Mohajirs* recreate a "surrogate" Lucknow in Karachi with their deep nostalgia for their homeland, language, tastes, culture and climate. Through such poignant narrations, they attempt to subvert the logic of the nation-state as experienced during Partition whereas the selected renderings of Partition in Malayalam seem to endorse nationalist ideologies. Though such a critical evaluation of Partition is absent in the selected narratives by the Progressive Writers in Malayalam, they

⁸⁹The studies of the Progressive Writers Association point out that the early writers in the tradition were committed to advance the course of the national movement. Through their writing, they strengthened the national imagination by "infusing it with social content" (Ahmed 2006, 5). Writers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz in Urdu and Amrith Rai in Hindi belonged to this early generation. However, Partition unsettled the political vision of PWA drastically. Several writers migrated and lost their families in riots. These bereaved writers narrated the stories of despair and disillusionment. For a detailed discussion, see Ahmed (2006) and Gopal (2005).

⁹⁰For instance, see Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" (2011) and Paul's *Sleepwalkers* (2000)

⁹¹Joginder Paul (1925- 2016) is a famous Urdu writer born in Sialkot, which is in present day Pakistan and migrated to India following Partition owing to which the sense of displacement became a central theme in his writings.

⁹²Mohajirs, popularly spelt as 'Muhajirs', are the community in Pakistan, constituted by the Muslim immigrants from various parts of present-day India who migrated to Pakistan following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The term was originally used to refer to the followers of Prophet who migrated from Mecca to Medina to avoid religious persecution. For more details, refer Ghosh (2001).

attempt to portray the bifurcation in the background of nation formation by underlining the evils of communal polarisation. Their attempt can be seen as a vernacular portrayal of Partition distant from its physical manifestations and political contexts, yet, ‘pan-Indian’ in its nationalist ethos of condemning the violence and the marginalisation of minority communities. The way the selected narratives historicise the strong presence of the ‘regional’ as revealed in their negotiations with the politics of partition in the context of the emerging nation is analysed in the following section of the chapter.

IV. Writing the Region into the Nation

Across the vast array of Partition literature, the zeal to embody people’s experiences during such a turbulent period can be observed (Didur 2006, 42). They often originate from and negotiate with the complex political zones produced during nation-building (Cleary 2003, 6). It is in these realms that various communities and identities interact and negotiate with their differences. On the one hand, while these historical processes gain significance in their vernacular contexts, on the other, making sense of these processes becomes the context for these regions to negotiate and understand their own ideas of nationalism and religious co-existence. On the surface level, the narratives on Partition serve the purpose of being “one of the media through which one understands and memorialises the trauma” (Cleary 2003, 10). However, while ratifying or contesting the state divisions and the partitioned mentalities generated, the more significant dynamics of nation and nation-building are revealed, not only in the bifurcated geographies but also in the vernacular contexts.

In Kerala, with the strengthening of the nationalist movement and the popularity of the idea of a unified linguistic state, the nationalistic discourse gained momentum across all frontiers of life. As the sense of belonging in the new nation shaped the new citizen-individual, there was also the clear delineation of a sub-national identity, which is developed simultaneously with the nation-building process. The literary arena was no exception to the

development of these (sub)national identities. The two major concerns in Malayalam literature of the period were ‘nation’ and ‘self’ (Raveendran and Jayasree 2017, 10). It was also marked by the wave of literary nationalism that showcased the normative ways of being a *Malayalee* and Indian (George 2009, 105). The themes, the characters and the life experiences through which they evolve became the normative paradigms in which nation as well as the region is constructed. However, how this nationalist vision endorsed the question of minority, especially in the discussions of Partition, is significant in analysing the ‘exceptionality’ attributed to the region. M. T. Ansari prods the linguistic nationalism in Malayalam literature by focusing on some of the canonical writers who occupied the forefront of the literary scenario during the post-Independent Kerala (2016). He substantiates how the canonical narratives are rampant with the nationalist ideologies of (mis)representing minorities (2016, xi). In similar contexts, these nationalist narratives dwell on the possibility of Islam being a constant threat to the notion of a unified nation. According to Ansari, it is visible in the literary nationalism in Malayalam literature as well (2016, 121- 178). This tendency is evident in the cultural sphere of the region. One of the famous socio-cultural magazines in Kerala, *Mathrubhumi* Weekly, has remained the mouthpiece of the nationalist movement in Kerala supported by the fraction of the Congress in the region (Thilleri 2008).⁹³ The magazine exhibited a highly nationalistic script. The speeches and articles of the INC spokespersons were translated and made available for the *Malayalee* audience. Through articles like “*Charkkayude Sandesham*” [The Message of Charkkah 1942], “*Khadi Presthaanam*” [The Movement for Khadi 1945] and essays on festivals like Diwali (1946), the magazine instituted the ‘region’ inside the logic of the nation for its readers. Nevertheless, in the vernacular understanding of Partition, *Mathrubhumi* offered the nationalist opinion of the Congress considering Pakistan as the communal chip played by

⁹³The magazine, started in 1932, can be considered a significant political voice of the period. Published by the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Company, Kozhikode, as an offspring of *Mathrubhumi* daily newspaper, the Weekly magazine included the important political, social and cultural discussions in the region. For a detailed discussion on the role played by the magazine in the national movement in the region, refer Thilleri (2008).

the All India Muslim League (Menon 1946). The writings of K. Kelappan adopted a socialist agenda in critiquing the issue of Partition through his column “Palarum Palathum” in the magazine (1945).⁹⁴ Such writings urged to place human beings at the centre of society irrespective of religion, caste, class markers and barriers, often neglecting the lived realities of minorities during and after Partition.

Another vital point to be remembered, as noted by Partition scholars like Cleary, is regarding the general conception that stresses the vulnerability and political instability of colonial societies during the imperial withdrawal (2003, 21). In such a context, these Partition narratives become another way of reinforcing the nation’s political stability where the sub-national regions claim their positionality within the nation. With its ‘exceptional’ narratives on community building and vibrant (sub)nationalistic fervour, Kerala also powerfully speaks through the narratives on Partition. Even while keeping hopes for the emerging nationhood, the region simultaneously delineates its own (sub)national identity of being a *Malayalee*. However, the narratives often explicitly make it clear that the nationalism and communitarianism pertinent to their land is not in a conflicting relationship with the ideas and promises of nationhood. Characters like Kittan and Congress *nethavu* [leader of Congress] in *Bhranthalayam* exemplify this juxtaposition of the region and the nation. While Kittan is deeply rooted in his locale with a strong affinity for his *naadu*, Congress *nethavu* becomes the mouthpiece of the nationalist aspirations. Together they form an amalgamation of affinities representative of the region of Kerala that the novel is addressing.

The literary narratives on Partition can be analysed in binary with respect to their responses to the bifurcation. Cleary argues that “the narratives can serve either to advance the goal of complete state separation and divergence or alternatively, to promote various modes of

⁹⁴K. Kelappan’s interference in the Partition discussions in Kerala is studied closely in the following chapter of the thesis.

convergence and integration” (2003, 59). According to him, the ways in which “either division or divergence are imagined, allow us to distinguish between regressive and emancipatory imaginings” (59). Manto’s stories are marked by a sense of anguish and anger in its portrayals of the convulsions of 1947. As terrifying chronicles of crime and madness, they promise nothing other than a repeated cycle of suffering. These stories do not seem to suggest any political, religious or moral solution to the misery (Bhalla 1999, 3123). The significance of Manto’s narrative realm lies in portraying an existentialist reality that one faces at the separation of people who had a long history of cultural and social contact (1999, 3125). They also present the paradoxical character of borders being a metaphor for the ambiguities of nation-building. He was, according to Bhalla, “offering a way of correcting the distortions inherent in state-centred national histories” (3125). On the contrary, the literary narratives in Malayalam, which emerged in the context of the bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent, adopt a conciliatory position from such categorisations. These narratives loom over newer ways of coming together while outrightly rejecting the politics of separation.

The role of literature in forging a sense of national identity has always been validated (Anderson 1991). From linguistic standardisation to constructing a secular, egalitarian identity, these works of literature have been considered integral to the nation-building project (Ramakrishnan 2005, ix). Several conceptualisations have been developed on how the narratives and nation constituted each other. Similarly, Fredric Jameson attributes peculiar national character to the literature of the “Third World” (1986): “all third-world texts are, I want to argue, allegorical and in a specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories” (69). Jameson argues,

third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a proper libidinal dynamic- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third- world culture and society* (1986, 69).

However, arguing for the theoretical impossibility of a category called “third-world” literature, Aijaz Ahmad negates Jameson’s argument of the “epistemological priority” of third world literature as national allegories (1987). Jameson’s affirmation of ‘nation’ as the central feature of the third world’s cognitive experience and the emphasis given over culture, society and collective excludes other modes of spatial or collective imaginations central to the African or Asian civilisations. Replacing the idea of the nation with the more enormous, less restricting ideas of collective brings in the possibilities of vernacular imaginings of spatiality into consideration. Such narratives construe the process of allegorisation not always in nationalistic terms but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal.

Nevertheless, critical realism became the primary form of narrativisation during the twentieth century amidst the nationalist concerns (Ahmed 2006, 117). ‘Nation’ was undoubtedly one of the dominant categories used in this narrative, and there was a vivid sense of sociality and collectivity (117). However, the categories which are deployed for the sense of collectivity were complex and several. In such a context, Dilip Menon discredits the idea of kinship and causality between nationalist sentiment and the emergence of the novel (2004). According to Menon, the novels in Indian languages tried to address their ‘troubled present in which questions of self, community and society had to be posed afresh’ (2004, 483). In an attempt to develop an interpretive framework that relates the Indian novels to their specific historical location, Menon deviates from the propositions of Anderson and Jameson that conflate nation and novel. The interpretive framework, which becomes his central argument, is that the early Indian novel was concerned mainly with the questions of the modern self and new forms of the community. According to Menon, the Malayalam novels written by lower caste groups in nineteenth century Kerala, project the imagination of a “place elsewhere” suggestive of the alternative spatial imaginations reflected in these novels (2004, 484). Menon elaborates how the fashioning of the caste self and a new collectivity occurs, which has been a

priority in the Malayalam literary imagination besides the nationalist question (491). This other arena of “localised, familial and fictive kin-based activities,” articulated with religious and kinship resonances have negotiated the nationalist imaginations (491). Thus, the novels in Malayalam often incorporated the national idiom in the reconstruction of self and community, in its attempts to delegitimise the restrictive social categories like caste and religion.

The question of what constitutes the core of Kerala’s Partition experience, amidst these social as well as political transformations, necessitates an inquiry into the idea itself. In the grand narratives of the nation, Partition may seem incidental or irrelevant to the southern parts of the subcontinent. As it has been already argued and is visible in the reading of the selected narratives, their writings dealt with socially significant themes with quotidian characters striving for an egalitarian society. Attempting a rupture with existing norms and conditions in the society and consequentially, in their narrative worlds, these social realists imagined an egalitarian society for the emerging nation which is devoid of the politics and fury of Partition. These were the primary challenges of a society recovering from the perils of long years of colonial administration and the constraints of caste hierarchy. The emerging social consciousness made it necessary for the people to reconsider their immediate concerns. The growing resentment against the British and the widely spreading nationalist fervour had instilled nationalistic aspirations. At the same time, people were also concerned with the issues of caste-class oppressions and economic inequalities at home. The social reform movements and the socialist and Marxist ideologies in the region had a substantial impression on the society’s psyche. It is reflected in the writings of the period, particularly from the tradition of the Progressive Writers Movement. In the writings, the depiction of growing religious intolerance in the society is limited to its economic understandings. For example, Kesavadev restricts himself to his socialist ideological position by heeding only the assumption that

conceives communalism as an economically motivated phenomenon.⁹⁵ It seems that Kesavadev's critique of the prevailing economic inequalities in the society often gets enmeshed in his efforts to trace the origins of communal hatred in the society.

The selected texts' (dis)engagement with Partition is primarily concerned with the immediate affairs of the region rather than a severe critique of the ideas of nationalism or secularism. As Ashutosh Varshney argued, the region's politics is developed against the dominant caste-class structure of Kerala society (2002, 138). In such a context, communalism, as it is in the country's northern parts, never emerges as an overwhelming category that defines Kerala's social and political consolidations. The attempt to contextualise Partition in such a society presents different concerns from that of the 'northern' narratives around Partition. The region's engagement with the idea of communalism becomes subtle, and the questions of caste-class inequalities gain prominence.

The writers' attempt to address the event and its consequences exhibits the concerns that spring from a region striving to grapple with the changing political and social scenario in the post-Partition years. The engagement with Partition as a theme in their works contests the conception of Partition as exclusively a northern debate and opens up discussions beyond its physical manifestations. One explanation for the springing of literary writings on Partition in regions like Kerala is its impact, which was so poignant that it could not be ignored. Thus, these writers have written on Partition not necessarily from direct experience but from having been moved by the suffering of fellow human beings. The works of the Progressive Writers abound with the principle of humanism which is part of such an effort wherein solidarity is brought in by acknowledging the commonality of human suffering. Writing about the difficulties experienced by the people can be seen as a way of engendering the people with a

⁹⁵Gyanendra Pandey, in his "The Prose of Otherness" identifies another trend in the Partition historiography where the sectarian violence is shadowed by 'larger impersonal forces- economic developments and class emotions drawing on the example of Sumit Sarkar (1994). For more details, refer Sarkar (1996).

feeling of ‘we-ness,’ a part of the process of imagining a new community constituted by the nation-region. Thus, the imagining of nation-region by addressing the issues of Partition calls into question the discernment of Partition as a ‘pan-Indian’ event. For obvious reasons, the event failed to initiate a discussion in the southern regions as it did in the north. However, its continuing impact in defining political and religious co-existence throughout the country has imparted a ‘pan-Indian’ expanse for Partition, and it is evident in its literary representations that emerged from the south. Thus, the selected texts also renegotiate the prevailing north India-centric belief about Partition by presenting its consequences in a *Malayalee* society.

This chapter tried to delineate a *Malayalee* perception of Partition as revealed in the selected literary narratives. In the process, the Progressive Writers Movement in Malayalam, with which the narratives associate, became a specific context for analysing Partition in Kerala’s particular (sub)national region. The analysis attempted a study of the literary representation of the event in Malayalam compared to that of other languages by drawing on recurring themes, metaphors and narrative frameworks. Through the political, social and religious realms embodied in the texts, the chapter invoked the history of Partition and Muslim identity in the otherwise ‘secular’ narratives of nationalist and Marxist historiography of Kerala.

Gyanendra Pandey stressed the ‘fragmentary’ nature of histories and historiography by elaborating on the ‘sources’ and nature of Partition historiography (1991). According to him, “what the historians call a ‘fragment’ is of central importance in challenging the state’s construction of history, in thinking other histories and marking those contested spaces through which particular unities are sought to be constituted and others broken up” (Pandey 1991, 571). This ‘fragmentariness’ contributed to the accessibility of umpteen number of Partition narratives which were often neglected in the ‘official’ histories of Partition. Most often, the

attempts to bring out the ambivalences within the nation-state have been made possible by incorporating literary narratives into their analysis. However, it would also be problematic to assume substantial differences between historical and literary narratives by analysing them in different watertight compartments by not allowing any interplay of influences. The strict categorisations between historical and literary narratives in relation to the absence-presence of factuality and human suffering necessitate an emphasis on a detached objectivity for the historical narrative. Later, conversations, negotiations and engagements arose among subaltern historians, feminists and literary critics, which dissolved these boundaries to conceptualise the histories of Partition without the yardsticks of objectivity. As the chapter engaged with perspectives that focus on the inter-relationship between literature and history, from ‘documenting’ to ‘re-presenting’ Partition, these narratives attempted ‘vernacular’ commentaries on the concepts of ‘nationalism,’ ‘subjectivity,’ as well as ‘history.’ They gain importance as “the writers of these stories frame the events in a variety of ways and read them according to their own sense of the multi-religious and multicultural past of the Indian subcontinent” (Bhalla 1994, viii). The writers, belonging to the literary modernity of Malayalam of that time, place Partition and its experiences outside the ‘secular’ domain of the nation. Often, ‘writing it off as madness,’ the narratives discredit the historical reality of Partition.

By analysing the representation of Partition in the selected texts, the chapter has argued that the writers deal with the experience in a number of ways, not always in conformity with literary representations of the theme from other geographical locations. The writers’ engagement with the theme can be considered another ‘fragment’ in the histories of Partition to be the vernacular narratives of the event in Malayalam. It provides new ways of understanding Partition as an event and also as a process that continues to influence the socio-political and religious life of the subcontinent. By raising a different set of concerns from that

of the north-India centric perceptions, these texts contribute to the imagining of Kerala as a politically, socially and communally distinct region. Thus, the selected literary narratives portrayed Partition in the context of the emerging nation from a southern region and disapproved of the politics that encompassed the events of 1947. Nevertheless, the postcolonial nation-state witnessed the repeated invoking of Partition as was seen during the formation of Malappuram district in 1969. The following chapter analyses the district formation as a reincarnation of Partition in Kerala society.

CHAPTER 4

Reincarnations of Partition: Reading the Malappuram District Formation Debates

The district of Malappuram resurfaced into the public discussions when K. N. A. Khader, the Member of the Legislative Assembly (henceforth, MLA), from IUML, called attention to the issue of the bifurcation of Malappuram district on 25th June 2019.⁹⁶ His demand was based on the argument that the highly populated district could be bifurcated into two separate districts for administrative conveniences (*Chandrika* 2019). However, the demand was criticised as IUML's communal agenda by the state government and the fractions of Kerala public sphere.⁹⁷ Similarly, during the discussions around the Alappad mining controversy in February 2019, the Minister for Industries, E. P. Jayarajan, made a taunting remark on the protestors that 'they belong to Malappuram.'⁹⁸ It is not the first time that Malappuram is being alleged to be associated with 'rebellion.' Among the many attempts from the part of the state government and like-minded organisations to silence the ongoing protests against mining in the context of Alappad, the statement made by the Minister alleged the district of communal character and the protest as 'abnormal' responses to such situations.⁹⁹ The statement was countered with a contested public response for the stigmatisation and stereotyping involved in it. This is one among the many instances of Malappuram being targeted and tarnished as the centre of terrorism and communal tendencies. There were more grave situations where the former Chief

⁹⁶Member of the 14th Kerala Legislative Assembly (2016- 2021), representing the IUML from Vengara constituency. He was elected through the by-election conducted in 2017.
<http://www.niyamasabha.org/codes/14kla/Members-Eng/54%20Khader%20K%20N%20A.pdf> (accessed on October 15, 2021).

⁹⁷Media discussions on the bifurcation also portrayed it as IUML's attempt to yield political mileage in the region, which was conceived as 'communal' interests.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24pBGZ_jVVU (accessed on June 15, 2020).

⁹⁸Alappad is a coastal village in the southern district of Kollam, Kerala, India. A narrow strip of land between the Arabian Sea and the TS (Thiruvananthapuram- Shoranur) Canal, Alappad has been in the news for the sand mining issue in the village. It is eventually causing the region's erosion. There was a vast anti-mining campaign and protest against the dredging and excavation works carried out in Alappad.

⁹⁹The Minister's remark triggered a public discussion on the same.
<https://tv.mathrubhumi.com/en/news/kerala/minister-ep-jayarajan-declines-malappuram-linked-alappad-mining-protest-1.11370> (accessed on August 20, 2020).

Minister of Kerala, E. K. Nayanar addressed Malappuram as ‘*kutty-Pakistan*’ in 1998 [small Pakistan] and the Central Home Minister, Amit Shah, labelled the district as ‘mini-Pakistan’ in 2020.¹⁰⁰ Such frequent invoking of Partition in relation to Malappuram can be traced back to various historical junctures and related discourses which form and shape the district. This chapter analyses the reincarnations of Partition during the formation of the Malappuram district.

The purpose of the chapter is to analyse how Partition is invoked in the discussions around the formation of the Malappuram district to underscore the communal tendencies evident in the normative understanding of the social design of the district itself. It throws light on how Partition is imagined, re-invoked and interpreted in its sub-national contexts. It also creates the opportunity to revisit the meanings Partition has imparted in the lives of the subcontinent. During the process, the chapter attempts to put forward two questions regarding the invocation of Partition in the context of Malappuram district formation: 1) Do the debates point towards the conception and reception of collective imaginations with a Muslim majority in a post-Partition scenario? 2) Do these debates throw light on the (im)possibilities of minority politics in a post-Partition scenario? For this purpose, the chapter looks at the various discussions around the formation of the Malappuram district. In doing so, the chapter studies the spectre of Partition, which continues to haunt the political, social, and religious lives in Malabar, playing a decisive role in constructing Mappila identity and shaping the idea of ‘contesting spaces’ within the nation. The Malappuram district formation has often been associated with the demand for *Mappilastan*, a singular Muslim collective imagination involved in the inception of the region. The district formation was followed by debates and protests, invoking the histories of Partition. Kerala Legislative Assembly debates, political

¹⁰⁰Examples of instances where both the national and regional leaders from contrasting political positions comparing the region to Pakistan (*India Today* 1998; *The Telegraph* 2020).

party documents, and media responses are analysed to understand the role of Partition memories in fabricating a history of communalism and the othering of Mappila identity.

The initial section of the chapter maps the Malappuram district formation delineating the details of the demand, debates and the process. This section also traces the discussions around the event in public media. The debates are closely analysed to record how Malappuram is imagined, and the memory of Partition invoked in favour of specific imagining of the region. In the second section, the debates in Kerala Legislative Assembly on Malappuram formation are brought into the analysis. The primary focus is to identify the social imaginaries invoked by regional imaginaries like Malappuram, as evidenced in these discussions. In the third section, these debates are analysed in the light of Rochana Bajpai's arguments (2000) on the question of the 'minority' during the Constituent Assembly debates. The attempt is to understand how the idea of the 'minority' is figured in the official language of the postcolonial state. Also, Partition is identified as a significant historical juncture that shapes these discourses in India. As the region of Malappuram is inextricably identified with its Muslim population, the final section of the chapter focuses on the development of the Muslim community in Kerala in order to understand their regional specificities, which imparted a regional character to the community. The IUML has remained the face and the voice of the community and the region in multiple ways. Their role in the formation of the district is identified in order to find out the manner in which the party has adopted a politics for the Muslim community which is intrinsically connected to their development and identified as communitarian in the ways of the postcolonial state as well.

I. District of Malappuram: Demand, Formation and Discontents

Malappuram was formed as the tenth district of Kerala on 16th June 1969 with its headquarters in Malappuram. Apart from being the most populous district in Kerala, it is one

of India's Muslim majority districts, where the community constitutes more than 70% of the district's total population.¹⁰¹ The district also records a population growth rate of 13.39% from 2001 to 2011.¹⁰² The name suggests the terraced land over the hills, indicating the landscape of the district. Before independence, the areas which constituted Malappuram were part of the Malabar district in Madras presidency. The present district is constituted by merging areas from the then Kozhikode and Palakkad districts. The regions of Eranad, Tirur, Kondotty, Nilambur, Tirurangadi from Kozhikode and sections of Perinthalmanna and Ponnani taluks from the Palakkad district formed the new district.¹⁰³

Demand for the new district of Malappuram

The demand for a new district was proposed for the first time in the 1960s. The idea of a new district has been associated with P. K. Ahammad, aka Bapputty, the first elected president of Kuruva Panchayath in Palakkad district (Basheer 2015, 44). The region, which was lacking in basic infrastructure and resources, prompted Bapputty to think about the possibility of a new district between Kozhikode and Palakkad to further the development activities in the region (2015, 45). On 7th July 1960, during the second session of Kerala Legislative Assembly, P. Abdul Majeed, MLA (IUML, ruling front) from Mankada (then part of Palakkad, currently in Malappuram), raised the demand for the first time, citing the social and economic backwardness of the region.¹⁰⁴ He proposed:

Sir, Districts have become the new avenues of governance, and their expenditure is also increasing every year. Having adopted the principle of

¹⁰¹According to the 2011 census records, the total population of Malappuram district is 41,12,920, of which Muslims constitute 70% and Hindus, 27% (2011 Census records, Government of India).

¹⁰²However, the population growth rate of the district decreased from 17% in 2001 to 13.5 in 2011 (Rajan 2005). It made headlines in newspapers, citing this as a particular case compared to the national condition and peculiar for a region with Muslims as the majority population. It points towards the prejudices the society holds against the Muslims and the region due to its demography.

¹⁰³The general information on Malappuram district is taken from the *Kerala District Gazetteers: Malappuram* (Kareem 1986, 1-13).

¹⁰⁴Adv. P. Abdul Majeed T. is an Indian politician who represented IUML in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, being elected from Mankada constituency, Malappuram, in 1960.
<http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m004.htm> (accessed on March 5, 2020).

decentralisation of power, we have granted more power to the districts. In such a context, it is important to consider Thiruvithamkoor- Kochi regions differently from Malabar, as the region was somewhat neglected when it was under the Madras presidency. I believe there are many possibilities available today to rectify the situation. While Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi regions are divided into six districts, Malabar has only three districts. There is nothing wrong in saying that districts in Malabar are considerably large. It creates significant hindrance to the administrative activities in the region, despite the officers' best efforts. Therefore, I have to submit the proposal before this government to increase the number of districts in the Malabar region ... A new district between Kozhikode and Palakkad would facilitate the developmental activities in the region. Moreover, I request the sanction of a new district to enhance the development of the Taluks of Eranad, Thiroor, Perinthalmanna and the like (*Proceedings* 1961, IX: 10, 1045- 46).¹⁰⁵

Since then, the demand was raised, discussed and debated in various spheres of Kerala society. However, the possibilities of the new district found light with the IUML being part of the political coalition which formed the government during the State Legislative Assembly elections held in 1967.¹⁰⁶ IUML was vocal about the demand to form a new district in their negotiations within the newly formed front (Basheer 2015, 205-206). At the IUML state conference during 24-25 February 1968, held at Mananchira, Kozhikode, the party decided to take up the demand for the new district in full force (Thangal and et al 2013, 210-211).

Another prominent stakeholder in the district formation was the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth CPM), as the district was formed during the tenure of the E. M. S. Namboodiripad led United Front government. For this purpose, regions had been carved out from the districts of Kozhikode and Palakkad. Even more than a decade after the state formation, Kerala was still in the process of finalising its political shape. The government

¹⁰⁵Unless and otherwise specified, self-translations of the Kerala Legislative Assembly proceedings.

¹⁰⁶During the 1967 elections to the Legislative Assembly in Kerala, a ministry led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad came into power with the support of a seven-party alliance called the United Front or *Saptakakshi Munnani*. Though short-lived, the alliance was formed by the collaborations of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), Communist Party of India (CPI), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Indian Socialist Party (ISP), Socialist Party (RSP) Kerala Socialist Party (KSP), and Karshaka Thozhilali Party (KTP). The alliance won the majority of 117 out of the total 133 seats (<http://www.niyamasabha.org/> accessed on March 10, 2020).

formed out of the novel coalition of parties had E. M. S. Namboodiripad¹⁰⁷ (henceforth EMS) as the Chief Minister, K. R. Gauri¹⁰⁸ as the Minister for Revenue and C. H. Muhammad Koya¹⁰⁹ (henceforth CH) as the Minister for Education, and the trio was important in materialising in the formation of Malappuram district.

On 5th May 1969, the Cabinet sub-committee headed by the Chief Minister acceded to forming a new district, carving out the taluks of Eranad and Walluvanad from the districts of Kozhikode and Palakkad. The formation generated strong reactions in many parts of the Kerala society supporting and disapproving the decision. The Congress, the oppositional front in Kerala Legislative Assembly at that time, and the Hindu right-wing political organisations levelled severe criticism against the formation of the new district.¹¹⁰

Anti-district Committee

The dissent came evidently from two political fronts: the Congress who formed the opposition in the Legislative Assembly, and the Hindu right-wing organisations like Jan Sangh and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the public domain.¹¹¹ While Jan Sangh took the leadership of the movement against the district formation, RSS and Hindu Maha Sabha extended their support (Basheer 2015, 61). On 16 October 1968, during the national conference of Jan Sangh held at Kozhikode, the agitation against the formation of Malappuram was

¹⁰⁷Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad (popularly known as EMS) was the first Chief Minister of Kerala state during 1957-59 and 1967-69. A prominent figure in the Communist Party of India, EMS led the CPI (M) faction after the party split in 1964. As the Chief Minister, EMS initiated land, revenue and educational reforms in the state, which later became the model for the entire nation (Secretariat of the Kerala Legislature 2018).

¹⁰⁸K. R. Gouri, popularly known as Gouri Amma, was the most prominent woman figure in Kerala politics. She served as the first Minister for Revenue of Kerala. After years of association with the Communist movement in Kerala, Gouri Amma later formed and led the Janaadhipathya Samrakshana Samithi (JSS) due to her differences with the leading parties in Kerala (Secretariat of the Kerala Legislature 2018).

¹⁰⁹One of the most popular leaders of the IUML, Cheriyan Kandi Mohammed Koya (popularly known as CH) was one of the former Chief Ministers and the only Muslim Chief Minister of Kerala. While serving as the Minister for Education, CH initiated many of the instrumental educational reforms for the Muslim community in Kerala (Secretariat of the Kerala Legislature 2018).

¹¹⁰The Oppositional front consisted of nine members of the Indian National Congress, headed by K. Karunakaran as the leader of opposition.

<https://kerala.gov.in/history-of-kerala-legislature> (accessed on June 10, 2020).

¹¹¹Jan Sangh (Bharatiya Jan Sangh), the prototype of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), marked their initial presence in the region through their campaign against the formation of Malappuram (Menon 1995, 19).

discussed as a national issue (Rajagopal 1970, 104). The 6th March 1969 was organised as ‘*Mappilastan* Virudha divas’ [Anti-*Mappilastan* day] on a national level, and the all-India President of Jan Sangh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, addressed a gathering at Thiruvananthapuram on this occasion (*Malayala Manorama* 1969, 9 March).

Vajpayee warned that the formation of Malappuram district is dangerous to the national integrity of India, and is also marked by crookedness and shrewd plotting. He said he is happy that the people of Kerala are showing readiness to fight the challenge of ill-intended *Mappilasthan*, and that there would even be a nationwide protest against the new district if required (*Malayala Manorama* 1969, 9 March).

Jan Sangh and other Hindu right-wing organisations used Malappuram as a political opportunity to get a foothold in the Muslim-dominated region. They deliberately initiated communal propaganda by invoking the histories of Partition and images of *Mappilastan* as evidenced in the speech. ‘Malappuram *Jilla Virudha Samithi*’ [Anti-Malappuram District Committee] was constituted to oppose the government’s decision to form the district with Adv. Kuttysankara Menon as the President and O. Rajagopal as the Secretary (*Malayala Manorama* 1969, 9 March). The Committee submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister, and it described the decision as the “illegitimate child of the two-nation theory,” invoking the memories of Partition in the context of Malappuram (Hardgrave Jr. 1977, 57).¹¹² According to the memorandum, the demand for Malappuram parallels the idea of *Mappilastan*, in relation to the historical specificity of the region and the community mobilisations of Mappilas.

In 1969, in response to the demands of the Muslim League in Kerala and as a reward for its political support, the United Front Ministry of E.M.S. Namboodiripad redrew the boundaries of Kozhikode and Palghat districts so as to carve out the new, predominantly Muslim district of Malappuram. Denounced by its opponents as ‘the illegitimate child of the Two Nation theory’, Malappuram – ‘Mopalastan’ to its critics – combined within a single district those taluks which forty-eight years before, in 1921, had been the scene of the Mapilla rebellion (Hardgrave Jr 1977, 57).

¹¹²Memorandum Submitted to the Chief Minister of Kerala, Perinthalmanna, Anti-District Bifurcation Committee, 1968.

One of the significant decisions which enabled the Jan Sangh to proceed with their propaganda in the protest against the formation of Malappuram subtly was the leadership of K. Kelappan, the renowned Gandhian in Kerala.¹¹³ Kelappan had a complicated political career, from being a socialist to Gandhian and an ardent follower of the Congress to a Hindu communalist towards the end of his life (Nair 2012, 5). The anti-district committee which he had led against the formation of Malappuram gained support through his popular appeal (79). Through the help of his Gandhian image, Kelappan initiated the satyagraha movement against the district formation and described Malappuram as ‘mini- Pakistan,’ an invocation that was to continue forever (*Frontier* 1968, 7 December).

Jan Sangh’s political campaign against the formation of the new district re-invoked the images of Partition and often interpreted Malappuram in the image of Pakistan at a national level (Rajagopal 1970, 105). They presented it as a reincarnation of Partition, where Malappuram became the vernacular imagination of Pakistan. The activities of the anti- district committee from 2nd June 1969 to 16th July 1969 frequently made headlines even in the national media. For instance, *The Indian Express* reported Kelappan’s speech on 30 June 1969.

Shri K. Kelappan has exhorted for a full-scale protest against the new district. His suggestion is that the mode of protest should include transgression of law and non-observance of taxation. The formation of Malappuram district is a forerunner of such demands arising across India. Indeed, the time has come for a protest. The Muslim League does not have any right to exist even as a political party, let alone to govern the country. Hindus in the state will disappear as Malappuram district is formed. Religious conversions will increase. Anti-national activities that are now confined to the borderlands of the country will spread to Kerala as well. This has to be nipped in the bud itself. He urged all patriots to march forward to the battleground, readying oneself for all kinds of sacrifices (*The Indian Express* 1969, 30 May).

¹¹³Known as the Kerala Gandhi, K. Kelappan is a renowned freedom fighter, social reformer and educationist. He participated in several social movements in Kerala. He was one of the founding members of the community organisation for Nairs, the Nair Service Society. He was an active member of the Congress and president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), though, left the party after Independence. He was a prominent leader of the *Aikya Kerala* movement to form the linguistic state of Kerala. He formed the Malabar Kshetra Samrakshana Samithi (MKSS) in 1967. He was critiqued for his partisan approach, evidenced in his participation in the agitation for the resurrection of a temple near Angadippuram in Malappuram (Nair 2012; Basheer 2015, 61-62).

The contemporary media in Malayalam of the period, especially newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*, with which Kelappan had a long association, and *Malayala Manorama*, endorsed the Committee's campaign to give a communal tinge to the whole issue within Kerala.¹¹⁴ Their role has been considered instrumental in giving authenticity to the activities of the anti-district Committee and their invocation of Partition in the formation of a Muslim majority district like Malappuram (Basheer 2015, 76). The report in *Mathrubhumi* on 2nd June 1969 reads as follows:

Kelappan opined that the ultimate aim of the Muslim League is to organise communal districts within every state in India. They see Malappuram state only as a stepping-stone towards this goal. Kelappan was speaking at the welcome meet, organized by the anti-district committee, in honor of Shri Kelappan and Shri P. Parameshwaran, who reached back after the campaign in Madras and Delhi, regarding the consequences of Malappuram state formation. The argument that a district is for development is a naked deception. What is the obstacle even now to construct more hospitals, schools and other infrastructures? Even the housewives in Eranad Taluk have started to say that *we have got a nation*. It is the continuous campaigns and influence of the Muslim League that resulted in them saying this. Kelappan pointed out that the Muslim League has *never shown national interest*. The Muslim League was born only to *divide the nation*. The Muslim League should have died with the partition of the nation, thinking that their goal was achieved. But the League leadership was not ready for that. The Muslim League has now re-entered the scene. True patriots have to become aware of the Muslim League's intention to *divide the nation again* and have to lead strongly against the move (*Mathrubhumi* 1969b, 2 June, emphasis added).

Under the garb of an anti-district approach, there was a substantial prejudice against the Muslim community, and the newspapers enforced a popular consensus in this attitude. In their narrations, the administrative powers given to a region with a Muslim majority invoked the idea of Pakistan and the politics of Partition.

There is a widening anxiety and fear among the non-Muslims of Malappuram. The Panchayat raj bill that confers the powers of the police force to the district council will worsen the situation. The police coming under the discretion of the district council, where the Muslim League has a strong foothold, is threatening

¹¹⁴K. Kelappan served as the chief editor of *Mathrubhumi* newspaper during 1945-50 (Basheer 2015, 61).

and is a matter of *national* importance (*Mathrubhumi* 1969a, 4 June, emphasis added).

The prejudice against a region with a significant Muslim population has been strengthened by highlighting the geographical positioning of the region. The landscape of the region with its proximity to the sea, which facilitated its multi-religious fabric and strengthened trade relations, was suddenly perceived as a possible den for anti-national activities. Kelappan, inaugurating his satyagraha against the district formation, stressed this point. According to him, the long seashore in the district where Muslims form the majority of the fishermen may develop relations with Pakistan (*Chandrika* 1969, 7 June).

If the proposed district of Malappuram is formed, it will be a *small Pakistan*. The Muslims of Malappuram are already troubling non-Muslims. There is an Islamist organisation in Ponnani that is converting thousands of non-Muslims into Islam. Malappuram is a coastal region. It is not entirely impossible that they will not establish coastal relations with the formation of the district (*Mathrubhumi* 1969, 6 June, emphasis added).

As the afore-mentioned discussions establish, the public discussions against the district emphasised four factors pertinent to the region in its conception as the incarnation of Partition. The region's population with a Muslim majority, the autonomy given to the district as an administrative unit, the geographical positioning of the region, and its history of communal mobilisations were constantly invoked to compare it to the political context of Partition. These invocations also reveal how such meanings attached to Partition are received even in its vernacular contexts.

Another crucial political context to be analysed along with the histories of the formation of Malappuram is the protest that happened at the Thali temple, Malappuram, during December 1968.¹¹⁵ At the time of the commotions around district formation, the temple was in a

¹¹⁵It is an ancient temple located in Angadippuram in the present district of Malappuram, popularly known as 'Thaliyil Shiva Khethram.'

dilapidated condition. As part of strengthening the communal angle in the anti-district propaganda, K. Kelappan, who was also part of the Malabar *Kshetra Samrakshana Samithi* (MKSS), along with other Hindu right-wing organisations, tried to renovate the temple in order to open it again for the devotees (Basheer 2015, 70). This created tension among the Hindus and Muslims of the locality, which strengthened the communal prejudices against the district.

Feelings are now running high between Hindus and Muslims on account of the hullabaloo over the formation of Malapuram district. Mr K. Kelappan, the true-blue Gandhian and Sarovodayite is now staging satyagraha for reviving a long discarded, derelict temple. The temple, in ruins, is on a "Porampoku" land which is surrounded by Muslim houses. It is alleged that the temple has not been used for any Hindu religious rites for a long time now. The move to revive the temple was ill-received by the local Muslims who have a mosque near it. Communal feelings have run high: clashes took place in which several were injured and one killed. The satyagraha by Mr Kelappan finds a prominent place in the leading pro-Congress dailies (Ramji 1968).

The resurgence of temple activities has been one of the effective methods adopted by the Hindutva cultural politics in the region since the 1960s (Roopesh 2017, 12). The issue at Thali temple was one of the first initial interventions in this strategy. Temple as a new site of 'contestation' often contradicting the nationality and secularity claimed by the region has been an intrinsic feature of what constitutes Kerala public (2017, 12). The neo-revival of temples in Kerala and Sangh Parivar's related cultural politics enabled a Hindu consolidation in the region without much organisational impact (14). The cultural politics adopted by the Hindutva forces fuelled the innate fears regarding the minor subject. Arjun Appadurai, though in a varied context of globalised era with its heightened ethnic violence, discusses the social uncertainties which lead to inter-ethnic tensions (2006). Among the various reasons which lead to such anxieties, he particularly mentions the type which arises from what he calls 'census concerns' (2006, 61). "How many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory? Or, in the context of rapid refugee or migration movements, how many of "them" are there among us?"

(61). These anxieties formed during such situations can affect the relationship of many individuals to a minor group for state-provided goods and other benefits or simply for existing as a group (62). It is a similar fear regarding the ‘minor’ subject that the anti-district committee tried to instigate in the context of the formation of Malappuram.

Malappuram being *Mappilastan*

The pamphlet circulated by the Sangh titled “Malappuram or *Moplahstan*” initiated the comparisons between the new district of Malappuram and Pakistan (Basheer 2015, 69). The pamphlet attributed the idea of Malappuram to Pakistan and was distributed across the country by Jan Sangh in its anti-district campaign (*Chandrika* 1969, June 16). *Mappilastan* as an idea emerged soon after the independence, followed by the division of the Indian subcontinent into India with a Hindu majority and Pakistan as a Muslim majority nation.¹¹⁶ It was borne out of the insecurities left by the violent memories of Partition for the Muslim minority communities to belong in a nation with a Hindu majority (Wright Jr. 1966, 581). In Malabar, the alienation experienced by the community after the Mappila Rebellion from different fronts of society also fuelled the imagination of *Mappilastan* (1966, 581).

The present-day Malappuram is formed by those regions that witnessed much of the action during the series of Mappila revolts in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Hardgrave Jr. 1977, 57). It is identified as one of the reasons behind the stagnant status of the social and economic development in the region, even many years after Independence.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶Mohammad Ismail, President of the All India Muslim League, Madras state, demanded a *Moplahstan* (*Mappilastan*) based on the argument that Mappilas are racially different from Hindus, mainly being the descendants of the Arabs,’ and that ‘their religion, culture, civilisational aspirations and outlook on life was different from those of the other inhabitants of the west coast of Madras’ (Dhulipala 2015, 470). He claimed that the Mappilas formed a majority in the region, and the state would be 3000 square miles in area, more extensive than states such as Cochin. However, the claim gained no popularity among the members of AIML, and V. Ramaswami Naicker also opposed it as the claim was going to cut into the territories demanded Dravidastan by his Dravidian Federation (Dhulipala 2015, 470).

¹¹⁷Hardgrave Jr. (1977) makes this observation in his article about how the area of Malappuram district is, coincidentally, formed by those regions which witnessed the Rebellion in its heightened form. As observed by the

Mappilastan, which was imagined as a state with Muslim majority as its basis, created many repercussions in the society (Wright Jr. 1966, 581). The idea was repeatedly compared to the formation of Pakistan, and generated fears regarding the rupture of communal harmony it might engender as in the case of Partition.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, the idea for the new district of Malappuram also created similar kinds of fears and discussions in *Malayalee* society. The opponents of the district showcased Malappuram in the mirror image of *Mappilastan*, reflecting the danger of another Pakistan.

II. Legislative Assembly Debates

Apart from the resentments and apprehensions in society regarding forming a majoritarian Muslim district, the debates generated in the Legislative Assembly of Kerala, known as *Niyamasabha*, also account for the political anxieties concerning the region. The discourse in the public domain in terms of the anti-district protests and related discussions in the media presented the event predominantly on communal lines, as a reincarnation of Partition. However, within the Legislative Assembly, the district formation debates engaged with themes ranging from population, IUML's 'communal' politics, development and financial liability, and the region's history. The significant discussions around the formation of Malappuram district took place in *Niyamasabha* during the second session of 1968 from 5th to 30th August (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIII: 1-10) and its first session in 1969 from 3rd January to 27th March (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 1- 45).

With the widening of the movement led by the IUML for the formation of a new district, especially after the IUML state conference in 1968, the topic received much attention in the

early scholars of the revolt, the establishment of a Mappila regime, usurping the colonial authority, was often quoted as an example of political anarchy where the dissenters assumed autonomy. See, Nair (1923, 21-23).

¹¹⁸In a series of correspondence between Sardar Vallabhai Patel and the Chief Minister of Madras Legislative Assembly in 1947, there were constant suggestions from Mr. Patel to keep the demand of *Mappilastan* in check on account of the communal tensions involved in it (Shankar 2011, 259).

Legislative Assembly (Thangal and et al 2013, 167).¹¹⁹ Therefore, the initial attempts from the opposition led by the Congress were to reject Malappuram formation in terms of its population as well as the community politics of IUML. N. I. Devassikkutti (Congress (R), opposition), MLA from the constituency of Manalur, raised the first question regarding the formation of the district, initiating the debates in the Legislative Assembly.¹²⁰ Most of the initial questions were to find out if there was any demand from IUML to the state government to form a new district constituting the Muslim populated areas of Kozhikode and Palakkad districts. N. I. Devassikkutti's question– “is there a demand from the party of Muslim League to the Government to form a new revenue district by joining some of the regions of Kozhikode and Palakkad?” (*Proceedings* 1970, XXII: 6, 844, emphasis added)– was an attempt to emphasise the conception of Malappuram as the brainchild of IUML. However, the then Minister for Revenue, Smt. K. R. Gauri, in her reply, dismissed the existence of any such particular demand from the party as she said, “there is no request from the state Muslim League Party to form a new district centred on Malappuram. However, recommendations have been received from various institutions and associations among which Muslim League is also included” (*Proceedings* 1970, XXII: 6, 845). The Minister's attempt can be seen as part of the effort to present the demand as it had been coming from different sections of the society than exclusively from IUML.¹²¹ As mentioned before, IUML was part of the *Aikya Kerala Munnani* [United Front of Kerala], the political alliance which formed the government in the third Legislative Assembly election in 1967. Moreover, the taluk of Eranad and other parts of Perinthalamanna,

¹¹⁹The IUML state conference was convened on 1968 February 25-26 at Kozhikode in which the party's state and national leaders participated. The conference became a turning point for the demand for the new district of Malappuram. C. H. passed a resolution regarding the same in the conference (Thangal and et al 2013, 208, 212).

¹²⁰N. I. Devassikkutti was elected as the MLA from Manalur constituency in the Thrissur district in 1967. He was elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly four times as part of Congress (R) and later represented the Indian National Congress. <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m139.htm> (accessed on September 25, 2021).

¹²¹These discussions took place at the Legislative Assembly session on 22nd January 1968, where the initial inquiries during the formation of Malappuram took place (*Proceedings* 1970, XXII: 6, 844). The proceedings reveal that the Minister for Revenue, K. R. Gauri, reiterated the government's position of not intending to form the new district on the 20 February 1968 and 27 March 1968 (*Proceedings* 1970, XXII: 8, 1245; XXII: 30, 3437).

Ponnani and Tirur were the areas where IUML had a strong presence. Because of these reasons, the demand was often perceived as a bargaining chip used by IUML (*Malayala Manorama* 1969, 6 February). Another critical concern regarding the population as raised in B. M Bhandari's (Independent, opposition) question about whether there was any demand to form a *Muslim majority* district which was rejected by the Chief Minister, EMS (*Proceedings* 1970, XXII: 8, emphasis added).¹²² The Chief Minister was dismissive about the parameter of religion as a defining feature for the new district, thereby negating the imagining of Malappuram in terms of its populace, at least in its official sanctioning. Conceiving the district as the brainchild of the IUML and a district with a Muslim majority are based purely on the region's population and a politics construed within such religious constitution. The considerable presence of Muslims, constituting more than 70% of the total population, resulted in the definition of Malappuram as a district with a Muslim majority. It became the dominant idiom in all the possible conceptions of the district. It also made the references to Partition invoked in the context of Malappuram formation feasible. However, the state government tried to defy these definitions as the reasons for the official sanctioning of the district.

The opposition's apprehensions and the state government's hesitancy in defining Malappuram on the basis of its inhabitants' religion stems from the nationalist narrative of religion as a parochial yardstick to define any unit within the secular nation-state. The opposition accused the state government (led by CPM) of opportunism to retain their power by conceding to the demands of the IUML. K. T. George (Congress, opposition), MLA from Paravoor, raised this argument of the district being an appeasement tool: "there is no other intention to form the new district [Malappuram] than the appeasement of a few parties... Is the

¹²²B. M. Bhandari was an independent MLA from the constituency of Manjeswaram, Kasargod district in the third Kerala Legislative Assembly. He was against the formation of Malappuram and publicly endorsed the activities of the anti-district committee. For more details, see <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m388.htm> (accessed on September 25, 2021).

Chief Minister considering the opinion of C. H. Muhammad Koya in this regard (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 24, 2169- 2170)?¹²³

However, in a counter-argument, the government accuses the opposition of reiterating the communal politics of the right-wing and thereby hindering the region's development. The Revenue Minister, K. R. Gouri tried to expose the opposition's communal prejudices evident in their disapproval to form the district.

Since the opposition is showing complete disagreement with the formation of the Malappuram district, I would like to know Congress's ultimate opinion regarding the district's formation, whether they favour the district or not. It would be great if you [K. T. George] could explicate the point that this is not only about development and administrative convenience (*Proceedings* 1970 XXIV: 24, 2172).

The attempt presented the inconsistencies in the opposition's argument proving their parochial intentions behind their disapproval of the district formation. P. M Abubacker, the MLA from the Calicut constituency (IUML, ruling front), also criticised the opposition for being the Jan Sangh in the House in their arguments against the decision to form the new district.¹²⁴ He cited examples from the states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh where the Congress themselves while being in power, formed new districts and taluks for administrative convenience. He also pointed out the examples of the new state formations like Nagaland, Mizoram and Haryana to emphasise that demography based on religion or caste never hindered these administrative decisions. Furthermore, he also observed that opposing the district formation because its inhabitants are Muslims in the majority is an argument of the Hindutva ideology (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 3, 131).

¹²³K. T. George was an important politician of the Indian National Congress in Kerala who was elected to the third Kerala Legislative Assembly from the constituency of Parur in Ernakulam district. <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m170.htm> (accessed on June 10, 2020).

¹²⁴P. M. Aboobacker was one of the prominent leaders of the IUML and a member of the third Kerala Legislative Assembly from the constituency of Calicut. http://www.stateofkerala.in/niyamasabha/p_m_abubacker.php (accessed on June 18, 2020).

EMS has been criticised for his political opportunism as he expected a strong foothold for the party in Malabar and among Muslims through the district formation. Though the CPM-led government was persistent in countering the arguments of Malappuram being the prodigy of IUML, EMS, in his later observations on the formation of the district, reflected how the party has been adamant in their demand to form a district with a Muslim majority in order to strengthen their political network. In his *Communist Party Keralathil* [Communist Party in Kerala], he criticises IUML for manipulating their position in the *Saptakakshi Munnani* for political mileage, which resulted in the growth of both majority and minority communalism in Kerala (Namboodiripad 2009, 826-30).

The discussions reveal the probabilities and constraints of formulating a politics of place within the postcolonial nation-state where “the opposition, on the other hand, is accused of blocking a purely administrative measure out of parochial considerations of Hindu communalism and thereby denying development to a section of the population, their Muslimness being a mere detail” (Shafeeq 2014, 100). Thus, it is clear that both fronts are dismissive about religion being the primary category to conceive any region within the national imagination of territory. The opposition conceives Malappuram in terms of its Muslim population in their arguments against its formation. In contrast, the government reiterates the narrative of backwardness and development to discredit the imagining of the district solely based on its religious configuration.

A Narrative of Development

The narrative of development is the continuously used idiom by those who favoured the formation of the new district. The IUML and the ruling political coalition resorted to this narrative whenever their intentions were alleged to be communal and parochial. K. R. Gauri and EMS repeatedly focused on the economic and social backwardness of the region while

defending the district formation (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 24). They presented the Muslim majority as an accidental feature which describes the region among many other factors. One of the questions by K.T Jacob (CPI, ruling), who was in favour of the district formation on 22nd October 1968, brings in the angle of development.¹²⁵ “Has the government decided to form the new districts given *administrative conveniences*?” (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIII: 11, 1038 emphasis added). One can notice the emphasis given on administrative convenience and developmental strategies rather than on the religious factor or the community politics of IUML. This method could later form the official narrative on which the ‘authenticity’ of the region is translated.

Despite the ruling front’s allegations of being parochial in their disapproval of the formation of the district on communal lines, the opposition continued to voice their difference in terms of expenditure and financial liability imposed on the state by the new district. The question raised by Devassikutty (Congress (R), opposition) stressed the argument of financial burden upon the government as a counter to the development-oriented justifications for the formation of an additional district. He enquired: “what [were] the factors the Government considered to divide the existing districts and will the decision be increasing the financial burden on the government and if it does, could the Government be able to give an estimate” (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIII: 15, 1334- 5).

It is interesting to note that in the discussions in the *Niyamasabha*, over the formation of Malappuram district, both the questions and the answers had to be framed in the language of financial and administrative liabilities, which seems to be the possible language within which such decisions find its rationality in the postcolonial state. One of the intrinsic features of a

¹²⁵K. T. Jacob was elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly from the constituency of Udumbanchola (part of the present Idukki district) consecutively during the elections of 1965 and 1967, representing the Communist Party of India (CPI). The party being part of the alliance which formed the government in 1967, he was one among the members who supported the formation of new districts. Moreover, he was in approval of the decision to form the new districts as his constituency being located in the region to be part of the new district of Malanadu/Idukki. <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m231.htm> (accessed on June 19, 2020).

postcolonial nation-state identified by Partha Chatterjee is “the ambiguities of legitimation,” which is in contrast to the western conditions of being a nation (Chatterjee 1993, 216-18). He aptly describes this condition through the example of the Nehruvian vision of industrialisation as one of the crucial steps towards modern nationhood (217). Similarly, many modern principles identified as instrumental in the Western sense of being a nation-state might have to be rejected or twisted for the nation to emerge in its postcolonial imaginations. As Chatterjee observes:

... first, that these ambiguities are *necessary* consequences of the specific relation of the postcolonial developmental state with the people-nation; second, that it is these ambiguities which create room for maneuver through which the passive revolution of capital can proceed; and third, that these ambiguities cannot be removed or resolved within the present constitution of the state (1993, 216-17).

Imagining an administrative unit within the postcolonial nation-state can also entail similar ambiguities. A district is an administrative unit within the postcolonial state which has to be interpreted in the entrenched logic of the state. In such a context, the nation becomes possible by accommodating and rejecting the earlier ways of imagining collectives, which the nation-state has been trying to exceed and delegitimise. As it has been argued, for the Indian nation to emerge, it has incorporated, manipulated and diffused the earlier collective markers of caste, religion, language, among many others (Chatterjee 1993, 5). However, once the postcolonial nation-state has taken its shape, these social imaginaries might lose its validation and legitimacy at least in the language of the state, in its public utterances. The administrative unit of the district of Malappuram could be imagined in various ways. Its population with a Muslim majority, the developmental needs, administrative convenience, the specific historical experience which shaped the region, the particular geographical positioning and other social and cultural factors might have gone into these various imaginings. Each criterion cannot find legitimation within the postcolonial state, and it can create ambiguities that Chatterjee identifies as intrinsic to the postcolonial national imaginations.

To find legitimacy, the official definitions have to be uttered in the possible and permissible language of the postcolonial state, irrespective of conditions that make such imaginings possible in society. As those who oppose Malappuram imagine the place along its demographic lines, the government, in the language of the state, tries to refute these claims by showcasing the region as an administrative unit imagined for administrative convenience and developmental interventions. Mohammed Shafeeq also substantiates the government's repeated attempts to reiterate what he calls the “rhetoric of administration and development” to present Malappuram as an integral unit of the secular postcolonial state wherein the primary focus is secular development (2014, 96). As the Chief Minister, EMS, asserts,

For the administrative efficiency and to focus on backward areas, the government has decided to form two new districts and to integrate Taluks and Community Development Blocks as units of administration (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 1, 5).

The idea of a ‘mini-Pakistan’ as alleged by the opponents has been countered by the state government through their developmental narrative. Interestingly, even the oppositional front in the *Niyamasabha*, in their disapproval of the district, had to employ the language of financial liability and administrative burden to legitimise their claims. Though the trope of development can be identified as an intrinsic characteristic of the legitimising strategies of the postcolonial state, Kerala presents its own historical trajectory of development in transforming the region as a distinct unity. Often their developmental aspirations have been projected as a collective image of *Malayalee* defying the communal tendencies in the region. The regional media during 1950-60s furthered the collective imagining of Kerala through the dream of a ‘Progressive Kerala’ (Devika 2007, 28). Devika argues that “in most of such texts, the ‘Malayalee People’ or Kerala emerge as if unified, a precarious, often outright rancorous unity forged in opposition to various hostile Others” (2007, 28). Through the projection of development as an intrinsic feature of the collective existence of the region, communities are also made active contributors. In such a scenario, communities are treated as legitimate political categories to further the

developmental processes (Devika and Varghese 2010, 15). The formation of Malappuram, a district with a majority population belonging to a minority community, also exemplifies the phenomenon where the community configurations are treated as the necessary variables for development. In the discussions within the *Niyamasabha*, references are made to the social conditions of the Muslim community and the historical trajectory of their evolution as part of defining the district in developmental terms (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 3).

The History which shapes the Region

One of the significant aspects of the district invoked in the Assembly debates is the particular historical evolution of the region in terms of colonial experience and the development of communities. While the opposition attempted to invoke such histories in their concerns over inter-community relations and communal harmony, the ruling front interpreted it in terms of developmental and infrastructural needs. Apart from the histories of colonial interventions in trade and rich religious diversity, one of the significant political and historical experiences that shape the region is its anti-colonial and anti-feudal confrontations (Panikkar 1989). Among many others, the series of resistances collectively known as Mappila revolts and its culmination in 1921 as the Malabar Rebellion have deeply woven into the social and political fabric of Malabar. As several studies on the region have identified, the historical rupture imparted by the Rebellion has contributed significantly into the way identities have been conceived in and for the region (Ansari 2016, 73). These historical experiences and the collective imaginings followed have definitely gone into the conceptualisations of the district of Malappuram as well.

During the first session of the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1969 (January to March), the Governor's address endorsed the formation of two new districts of Malanadu and Malappuram (*Proceedings* 1970, XXVI: 1, 1- 10). The discussions on the address triggered another set of debates explicitly centred on the region's historical specificity involving

community factors. The opposition attempted to pitch in the dangers of communal polarity that would follow the formation of a district where Muslims form the majority. The members in the opposition despised the Governor's address for its approval of the district formation. The decision to form the new districts was strongly condemned by members like Joseph Chazhikkattu, K. Karunakaran and K. P. R. Gopalan. Chazhikkattu found the decision hasty and biased in light of other significant issues, in front of the government, such as the shortage of rice supply from the central government and likewise (Proceedings 1970, XXIV: 2, 55). It was Joseph Chazhikkattu (Kerala Congress, opposition) who critiqued the district in terms of its history of communal resistance.¹²⁶ He observes:

There is no urgent need to create the new districts of Malappuram and Malanadu. How much hullabaloo has been created by the decision so far? Malappuram is called *Mappilastan* and Malanadu as Christianistan. This will create tensions in inter-community relations in the region (Proceedings 1970, XXIV: 2, 55).

Similarly, K. P. R. Gopalan also alleged that the district could disrupt the inter-community relations in the region. He critiqued the Government for being partial to IUML to create a 'Muslim' district (*Proceedings* 1970 XXIV: 2, 220-21). K. Karunakaran, the leader of the opposition, expressed that he had no resentment in favouring a community if the formation of a new district would sustain their development and improve their condition.¹²⁷ However, he harshly criticised the Chief Minister for repeatedly exploiting the experiences of Mappilas as he referred to the historical experiences of the community as well as the region (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 4, 253-4).¹²⁸

¹²⁶Joseph Chazhikkattu was a member of the third Kerala Legislative Assembly from the constituency of Kaduthuruthy in Kottayam district. He represented the Kerala Congress which was part of the oppositional front. <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m252.htm> (accessed on January 10, 2019).

¹²⁷K. Karunakaran was one of the veteran leaders of the Indian National Congress from Kerala. In the third Kerala Legislative Assembly, he represented the constituency of Mala, Thrissur district. During the term, he served as the leader of the Congress Legislative party and the Oppositional front in the House (Secretariat of the Kerala Legislature 2018).

¹²⁸The opposition leader, K. Karunakaran, in his disapproval of the formation of the district was careful not to adopt an explicit communal position. Instead, while acknowledging the backwardness of the Muslim community

Thus, the opposition invoked fears of an impending communal polarisation in the formation of Malappuram. The discussions reveal how a region with Muslims being the majority population ignites the fears of communal polarisation. They often alluded to the histories of Partition as a plausible explanation of their arguments. The opposition often expressed inconsistencies in their opinions towards Malappuram. Though they were firmly against the formation of Malappuram, there was an explicit incompatibility in their arguments. Though the communal angle involving the region's population triggered their discontent, they often tried to highlight their claims as different from Jan Sangh. Even within the front, Congress and Kerala Congress conveyed oppugnant interests in the subject. Their invocation to the history of the region, often in accordance with the nationalist interpretation of the 'minor' subject, problematised the Muslim belonging in the region, particularly for the Mappila community.

However, the ruling front attempted a reappraisal of this history by underlining the need for development. Among the members who supported the formation of Malappuram, P.S. Srinivasan and P. Govinda Pillai were highly vocal in their support for the district formation. P.S. Srinivasan (CPI, ruling front) mentioned the memories of the experiences during the Malabar Rebellion in favour of the new district.¹²⁹ He attributed the backwardness of the region to the discrimination and neglect meted out towards the region since 1921. He said,

I have gone to this place called Malappuram. The state of roads there! They were built during the Mappila rebellion so that the military could come, crush and kill the people there. The region is still undeveloped. I do not understand the commotions over the decision to form a new district in the region, just because the majority of people there are Muslims (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 3, 130).

in the region, he rather critiqued the decision as EMS's political gimmick than the development of the community. He raised his arguments in the response to the Governor's address on (*Proceedings* 1970, XXIV: 4, 253-4).

¹²⁹P. S. Sreenivasan was a leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and was elected to Kerala Legislative Assembly (1967- 1970) from Vaikom constituency, Kottayam district in the elections held in 1967. <http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m652.htm> (accessed on January 10, 2021).

It is interesting to note that the collective memory on which the opposition built their argument against the district was effectively used by the government to validate the need for its formation. It is evident in the arguments put forward by P. Govinda Pillai (CPM, ruling front).¹³⁰ He drew on the history of the Malabar region as well as the Mappila community in order to highlight the injustices meted out to the community, especially during the tenure of the Congress government. According to Pillai, the new district is an initial step towards rectifying the historical injustice by safeguarding minority interests. He argues that,

People in Malappuram and the adjacent regions have been living under oppression for the last 150 years. They have had little choice but to protest against these aggressions over the last 150 years and are often forced to respond strongly as their reactions brought more difficulties. The region has witnessed around 80 Mappila insurgencies in the past, of which stories are familiar to us. It was difficult to imagine that the minorities would get justice under the Congress government. The Congress party didn't allow the community to renovate their mosque until 1958 and was not even ready to correct the issues regarding the Mappila act. *They shouldn't be denied justice under this pro-minority government simply because it's a Muslim majority area, and it leads to this decision to form a separate district* (Proceedings 1970, XXIV: 3, 134, emphasis added).

These arguments are drawn for validating the historical experiences endured by the community of Mappilas that played a significant role in shaping the region. However, these historical injustices when juxtaposed with the religious quotient being part of the Government's decision to form the new district has been found problematic by its supporters as well as its opponents. The fact that Mappilas constitute the major part of the district has to be considered for historically substantiating the social backwardness of the region. However, as Shafeeq has argued, it has to be treated "incidentally" where the decision to form Malappuram district is seen devoid of any kind of validations owing to the region's religious composition (2014, 99).

¹³⁰P. Govinda Pillai, popularly known as P. G. was one of the most prominent leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from Kerala. He was elected to the third Kerala Legislative Assembly (1967-70) from the constituency of Perumbavoor, Ernakulam district.
<http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m203.htm> (accessed on May 10, 2020).

Such a conscious step has to be considered as part of the government's attempt to refute the allegations regarding its intentions and avoid any communal imagery associated with the region, at least in its official narratives. Even after the district formation, the apprehensions regarding Malappuram continued, reflecting in the Legislative Assembly discussions also. On 22nd August 1969, K. T. George (Congress, opposition) raised concerns over the 'peculiar situations' which might arise in the region.¹³¹ He discussed the statement made by "some" of the members of the Assembly that the decision regarding the district would be rethought owing to the development of any "peculiar situations" in the district (*Proceedings* 1970, XXV: 12, 865). The questions validate the apprehensions sustained in Malappuram's post-formation days until today, as evident during the instances mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. However, the government dismissed any such possibility considering the observation might be of a personal nature and the Minister for Revenue dismissed any possibility of the Government reconsidering the decision to form the district of Malappuram (*Proceedings* 1970, XXV: 12, 865).

The district formation held various stakes for several participants involved in the Kerala legislative assembly debates on the Malappuram formation. In their arguments for and against the district formation, various narratives were created. For the ruling party CPM and their allies, and those in favour of the district formation, development becomes the popular idiom making the decision necessary and politically justifiable. Whereas the CPM-led government is accused of political opportunism by those who do not favour the district formation. IUML, which was part of the alliance that formed the government, was alleged to be playing their selfish and communal interests by demanding a demographically Muslim dominated district. However, the opposition's morale was challenged for creating hindrance to development in the form of

¹³¹K. T. George was a member of the third Kerala legislative assembly from the constituency of Parur, Ernakulam district representing the Indian National Congress.
<http://niyamasabha.org/codes/members/m170.htm> (accessed on June 10, 2020).

the new district by bringing in parochial arguments, regarding the religious integrals of the region.

III. Constituent Assembly Debates on ‘Group preferences’ for Minorities

The discussions in the Kerala Legislative Assembly reveal particular vantage points with which Malappuram and the majority community in the district, the Mappilas, are perceived in relation to the particular historical junctures through which they evolved. The debates, dubbing the nationalist conceptions on minorities, explain how the idea of a Muslim majority is conceptualised in India in a post-Partition scenario. Often in the name of adherence to the constitutional principles of secularism and equality, it rejects the aspirations of minorities. Nevertheless, it alludes to the prejudices towards the minorities and their politics, which is central to the nation’s dominant (Hindu) logic in India after Partition.

In a similar vein, Rochana Bajpai explains the grounds on which religious minorities are excluded from the purview of ‘group preference’ by analysing the constituent assembly debates on the withdrawal of the safeguards for religious minorities during the drafting of the Indian Constitution (Bajpai 2000). She revisits the dominant nationalist opinion that ‘group preferences’ cannot be implemented to validate cultural singularities but ‘backward’ conditions. This hesitancy to accept ‘group preferences’ are defended mainly by invoking the memories of Partition of the subcontinent, as evident in the literature on the Indian Constituent Assembly debates (2000, 1837). Bajpai observes,

In the dominant nationalist opinion represented in the House by the Congress and its supporters among minority representatives, the backwardness of a group was regarded as creating legitimate grounds for group-preference provisions whereas perceived need to preserve a distinct cultural identity was not. This nationalist vision rejected political safeguards for minorities as a matter of general policy. Safeguards were regarded as legitimate only in the case of certain groups and only for the specific purpose of ameliorating the social and economic disabilities of backward sections (2000, 1837).

The irresolution in addressing Malappuram as a Muslim majority district also highlights a similar logic that denies the acceptance of the collective existence of minorities in the official narratives of the nation. On the contrary, they bring in the narrative of development in order to seek authenticity for the minority safeguards.

The retraction of group-preferences for religious minorities during the drafting of the Indian Constitution facilitates an analysis of the legitimating vocabulary on minority safeguards in the Constituent Assembly debates. For the national elites, considerations like minority safeguards were significant, leading to decisions like Partition. The traumatic event hardened the opinion within the Congress against groups that represented communal interests (2000, 1837). In the wake of independence, when the wounds left by Partition were afresh, the Constituent Assembly debates on minority preferences throw light on the nationalist perceptions over validations of ethnic identities being part of the state narratives. In the discussions, the Congress, the dominant voice in the House, represented the nationalist fears of cultural or ethnic validations in the Constitution. Bajpai observes:

considerations of cultural autonomy were sought to be rendered compatible with the nationalist elite's concerns regarding national unity. It was argued that only through the retention of their own distinct cultures could members of these communities contribute effectively to the nation. These arguments drew upon early nationalist conceptions that regarded communities, (defined in religious, caste and linguistic terms) rather than individual citizens as the building blocks of the nation (1838).

It is such ethnic validations that are contested while forming a district with Muslim majority like Malappuram. One of the significant points is the theme of 'territoriality' in these discussions, which was rejected as part of the provisions for minorities and other underprivileged sections. While differentiating between the claims made by the lower caste representatives and the tribal leaders, Bajpai points out how the demands of the backward castes were not territorial (2000, 1838). In contrast, the demands from the tribes, owing to the centrality of land in their lives, were intrinsically territorial (1838). However, the territorial

concerns were strictly denied to religious communities, especially the minorities. In a similar sense, territoriality attached to the Mappila community with the formation of Malappuram is identified as parochial or communal in the official language of the state.

The disagreements with such constitutional preferences were justified, since they drew on the constitutional principle of equality and secularism as the basis for the emerging nation-state. The opponents of these constitutional preferences for minorities relied on these principles and the concerns over national security.

The dominant opinion usually conceived the nation in terms of biological metaphors referring to it, for instance, as an 'organic whole', a 'body politic', a natural entity - whereas minorities were artificially created. Minorities were referred to as 'disfigurements,' 'cancerous', 'poisonous' for the body politic. Minority safeguards in such utterances were referred to variously as 'privileges', 'concessions' and 'crutches' (Bajpai 2000, 1839).

Favouring ethnic groups was viewed as archaic for the new nation based on the egalitarian principle of equality. They were also conceived as the cunning strategies employed by the colonial state as evident in their 'divide and rule policy' resulting in troubled inter-community relations (1839). The disagreements in legitimising minority provisions were argued upon the constitutional principles of equality and secularism. However, they have been highly influenced by the anxieties over minority mobilisations and politics. For the nationalists, Partition histories are suggestive of the perils of blending religion and politics which in turn disrupt the harmonious nature of the society.

It is the similar fears regarding communal mobilisations which are invoked in the context of Malappuram. The demand for separate electorates for Muslims was one of the significant political safeguards raised by religious minorities. The demand, which was built around the argument for representation, was rejected by the House. However, the demand to recognise and conform the ethnic or religious community as part of the nation-state structure and the discussions involved can be compared to the debates around Malappuram formation in the

Kerala Legislative Assembly due to the region's population where Muslims are in the majority. Shafeeq argues that it is the hegemony of the language of the postcolonial state which dominates the Kerala Legislative Assembly discussions on the Malappuram district formation.

He observes:

... the hegemony of the language of postcolonial state as it has constituted itself – that any pre-existing cultural solidarity should express itself in a language of economy; that any problem could pose itself only insofar as it can articulate an economic solution to that problem. It is in this addressal to a central state which is then constructed to be operating in a single rational consciousness that conversely the state itself acquires legitimacy (2014, 100).

However, this observation does not dwell on the fears and antagonism expressed towards the particular “pre-existing cultural solidarity” in this context. It misses out on the point that the conception of a Muslim majority district is indeed perceived problematic to the postcolonial nation's secular network. In Shafeeq's proposition, it is rather highlighted as an inability of the postcolonial state which challenges the authenticity of particular imaginings, political or social. However, the debates around the district formation analysed in the context of the division of the subcontinent, not only delineate the regional dimensions of Muslim belonging in India but also discusses the communal histories of Partition that have made pathways into the structural mechanisms of imagining collectives within the postcolonial state.

IV. A Malappuram Model

The ways in which Malappuram is perceived does not limit to these discussions on the formation of the district. Malappuram, the demographically distinct district in Kerala, has appeared in the region's public sphere for various reasons. In all those junctures, the region's Muslim community made their appearances as the main stakeholders of the politics and culture representing the district. Even though there are several historical and cultural specificities that

form the basis of these perceptions, the political contexts developed in the post-Partition scenario foregrounded the marginalisation of minorities, especially Mappilas, in the context of Kerala.

Amidst these nationalist conceptions of minorities and their politics, the Muslim community in Kerala holds its particular predicament by claiming a genealogy of regional specificity in terms of trade relations and cultural and linguistic traits. This distinctiveness has been observed as a deliberate attempt on the part of the community to overcome the historically experienced alienation (Punathil 2013, 14). Malabar has been historically identified as an intrinsic landmark in the trajectory of Kerala apropos to trade, religious plurality, cultural diversity and anti-colonial resistances. The Muslim community in the region, the Mappilas, has its origins in trade relations with Arabs and other European nations via the Arabian Sea. The Muslims in Malabar, unlike their community members in the northern part of the subcontinent, stayed aloof from political interests (Miller 1992, 203). Academic studies on the community identify this as an intrinsic feature of the Muslims in Kerala.¹³² The community has easily woven itself into the social fabric of the region through linguistic as well as cultural variables. The geographical positioning of the region also enabled smooth trade relations with countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Iran, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Syria resulting in centuries of religious and cultural exchanges. Malappuram district has performed a significant role in the upliftment of Mappilas as an influential minority community, socially and politically. Compared to the Muslim communities in other parts of the country, Mappilas have achieved a better position in terms of social and economic factors (Kanchana 2012, 282). The district of Malappuram, a small administrative unit, has thus proved to be an example in this regard. Anchoring the developmental process on basic infrastructural necessities, political empowerment of minority communities and participation in parliamentary politics,

¹³²For more details on the origin of Islam in Kerala, see Ibrahim Kunju (1989) and Miller (1992, 39-51).

Malappuram has served as the model for the upliftment of the Muslim communities in the post-Partition scenario.

The Sachar Committee report of 2006 pointed out the pan-Indian prejudices towards Muslims in the post-Partition days, resulting in them being treated as secondary citizens (Sachar 2006, 11). The report observed that Muslims in Kerala have better living conditions than the rest of the country (2006). Through conscious and deliberate effort, the IUML has played an essential role in being a prominent political voice in the region and taking its fair share in the electoral process. Their efforts have been persistent to rectify the identity crisis the Muslim communities and the community politics face in the aftermath of Partition throughout the country. IUML worked for the community's political empowerment, and has been successful to a great extent. The state of insecurity caused by the events happening at the regional level and Partition at the national level necessitated the community's political emancipation, which later manifested in them being stakeholders in electoral politics. It has to be highlighted that the IUML undertook this responsibility at a political juncture when the northern franchise of the All India Muslim League argued for a detachment from political activities, being suspected of divisive mentalities after Partition (Wright 1966, 583). IUML's survival in south India has often been traced to a radically different religious context where the proposal for Pakistan gained no momentum. Malappuram district has played an important role in ensuring the party's success in electoral politics, ensuring their significant presence in the *Niyamasabha* from 1952 to 2021 (Thangal and et al 2013).

The speculations regarding the formulations of the district were highly concerned with knowing whether it is solely an IUML demand, and it points towards the apprehensions regarding the party, its politics and aspirations. The discussions generated during the imagining, formation and later discussions of the Malappuram district are in many ways merged with the historical trajectory of the party and their socio-political significance in the

region. Santhosh R. and Visakh M. S. observe that “the political trajectory of Muslim League needs to be contextualised in the wider culture of democratic politics in Kerala, where the communal organisations claiming to represent the interests of religious, caste, sectarian identities have always played a significant role in political bargaining for securing state resources” (2020, 51).

The observation that the Muslim community politics in the twenty-first century revolves around its chief spokesperson, the IUML has been widely contested, citing the instances of different political movements within the community. In fact, the political changes in the 1990s following the Babri Masjid demolition created many repercussions in Kerala as well. The region witnessed the emergence of many neo-Islamic organisations with diverse ideological inclinations. They engaged with different issues with a motive to bank on different sections of the community for a political base.¹³³ However, IUML was able to counter such theological as well as political differences by displaying a deep commitment to secularism. Thus, IUML’s employment of religion with politics within the specific socio-cultural context of Kerala is perceived as communitarian in character, where the religion was delimited as a mobilisational tool (Santhosh and Visakh 2020, 56). The value orientations of the party have been able to maintain a powerful balance between religious morality and principles of Indian secularism like pluralism and toleration (56). However, the contemporary political situation in India has unsettled the moderate stance adopted by IUML, which raised criticism even from within (Santhosh and Paleri 2021). However, owing to the current political scenario, where the question of Muslim belonging has been facing threats nationally, and globally, the party had to transcend its political activities to ideological questions pertaining to the community. The fact that IUML emerged as the major political voice of the Muslims of Kerala in the second half of

¹³³ For a comparative analysis of IUML and other reformist political associations within the Muslim community in Kerala, see Santhosh and Visakh (2020).

the twentieth century has been uncontested. It has been achieved through a political manoeuvring of the community, contingent on the regional context, marking their “distinct political identity deeply embedded in the local context” (Gangadharan 1995, 15). Thus, along with Malappuram, IUML has also been a national model for Muslim politics in a post-Partition scenario in their community-based mobilisations.

It would be a historical oversight to trace the apprehensions and the antagonistic attitudes towards the social imagery of Malappuram exclusively to Partition. As argued, the scepticism regarding Malappuram and Mappilas can be historically traced to the days of the Rebellion. M. T. Ansari argues how the political category of the “fanatic” Mappila has been constituted, which later became the generic term to describe the region and its occupants (2005). However, Partition and the formation of Pakistan entailed the marginalisation of Muslims and their mobilisation on a national level. In this scenario, Malappuram exemplifies the nationalist prejudices towards the minority communities and the political model for Muslims to negotiate the prejudiced attitudes meted out towards them.

While continuing the discussions on the *Malayalee* perceptions of Partition in the previous chapters, the present chapter explored the ways in which Partition as a process generated public discussions in Kerala. The chapter analysed the apprehensions in the formation of Malappuram district with a Muslim majority as an instance of the reincarnations of Partition in the Kerala public sphere. Exploring the administrative, political and media narratives on the formation of Malappuram, the chapter discussed how the vestiges of Partition have time and again instigated its regional imaginaries to challenge the secular spaces of the nation. The chapter also explored Partition’s role in triggering a regionally specific community politics evidenced by IUML in Malappuram. In doing so, the chapter validates the argument that Kerala, though

geographically distant, has lived its own experiences of Partition and continues to live many more.

The debates around the formation of Malappuram explain how collective imaginaries, regardless of being social or geographical, involving minorities, especially Muslims, invoke the nationalist fears of another Partition. Attributing any mobilisations from Muslims as possible threats of forming another Pakistan reveals the nationalist prejudices imparted by historical processes like Partition. Gyanendra Pandey has significantly pointed out the multiplicity of *Partitions* and their many significances in the lives of the subcontinent (2001, 19, emphasis added). The formation of Malappuram district is definitely one of those moments where Partition had made its reappearance in the public life of Kerala. The discussions it generated also reveal how the spectre of Partition is present in its sub-national contexts like Kerala. It showcases the ways in which Partition is construed in its erstwhile contexts, irrespective of being geographically distant to the violence unleashed during the catastrophe. Though the region's particular social and political histories have gone into the ways in which Malappuram is being imagined, the parallels and comparisons drawn to relate the district formation to the bifurcation of the subcontinent explain how Partition continues to make spectral appearances in Kerala. Furthermore, how these southern regions like Kerala also perpetuate nationalist perceptions regarding minorities and their community politics is also revealed in these discussions. In its postcolonial logic of understanding collectives and their politics, 'region' is always already embedded within the 'nation.' As the figure of minority occupies a significant part of the changes induced by Partition in the postcolonial Indian society, the specific subjectivities formed within Kerala in its aftermath are analysed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Contested Identities within the Nation: Being ‘Paradesi’ and the Partitioned Lives

As part of exploring the reiterations of Partition, the present chapter attempts to predicate the regional discussions on Partition refugees on the figure of ‘Paradesi,’¹³⁴ who migrated from Kerala to current Pakistan only to come back later. The extensive population of out-migrants from Kerala includes people who travelled to Pakistan during the years that immediately preceded and followed Partition (Khalidi 1998; Roche 2011). As the term ‘Paradesi’ suggests, these migrant populations have found themselves extraneous in their homeland on returning to the post-Independence secular India.

Many attempts have been made to revisit Partition’s histories and its continuing effects in India, including the gendered experiences of recovery and rehabilitation of the Partitioned population (Butalia 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998; Menon, R. 2004). However, the constitutive migrations of 1947 and their impact on the postcolonial imagining of citizenship remains largely an under-explored history of Partition.¹³⁵ The chapter attempts to anchor the citizenship debates in Kerala around the figures of ‘Paradesi’ through an analysis of a series of personal interviews and textual analysis of the cinematic representation of their lifeworld. The chapter tries to make sense of the displacement of ‘Paradesi’ figures as a central trope in the way Kerala understood and imagined Partition, by exploring how their case is reflected in the cultural and political milieu of the region. The effort, I believe, will unravel a new history of Partition in its sub-national contexts.

¹³⁴I borrow the term “Paradesi,” from the exact title of the movie *Paradesi* (2007), on the life experiences of the Pakistani citizens in Kerala. The term means foreigner. The movie is discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter. The term is also used to refer to the Jewish community, exclusively in Kochi, Kerala. In this context, the term is used to distinguish the Paradesi/White Jews who are the descendants of the community from the ancient Israel from other indigenous groups within the Jewish community in the region (Katz and Goldberg 1993).

¹³⁵One of the significant moments in the study of Partition is the exploration of the gendered nature of its violence undertaken by Urvashi Butalia (1998), Kamla Bhasin and Rithu Menon (1998). How the question of women has been central in the way communities and nations negotiated with Partition has been argued by these scholars.

The first section of the chapter briefly discusses how Partition and the resultant (re)drawing of national borders have produced numerous refugees and how they continue to shape the ideas of citizenship in India. It also prods on the migratory politics engendered by Partition and how the movement of refugees across national borders contests and contradicts the nationalist conceptions of borders as well as the citizens who live within those borders. The second part analyses the figure of 'Paradesi' through their experiences shared during a series of personal interviews. Their precarious lives which have become a tussle between the national borders of India and Pakistan are explored in this section. The cinematic representation of the figure of 'Paradesi' is explored in the third section through a textual analysis of the Malayalam-language film *Paradesi*, directed by P. T. Kunju Muhammed in 2007. The section seeks to understand how the discussions on 'Paradesi' have been located in a humanitarian realm in the context of Kerala. The final section locates 'Paradesi' as a political subjectivity formed during Partition and explores how this identity is in constant negotiation with the region's 'exceptional' communitarian society.

I. Partition, Borders and the Refugee Question

The increasing trends and patterns in global migration and mobility have resulted in the emergence of transnationalism, which initiated a paradigm shift in the conceptualisations and workings of nations (Baubock 2017, 1-18).¹³⁶ Simultaneously, the nature of borders and the idea of citizenship have also undergone drastic reconsiderations due to international migrations (Smith and Bakker 2008). The studies on transnational movements have attempted to deconstruct the rigidity of nation-states and national identities (Hudson and Slaughter 2007, 1-

¹³⁶Nations worldwide have transformed into an extensive network due to globalization, communication, and diasporic populations, among many others. Global phenomena like migration and trade have contributed to the interconnectivity among people that language, culture, religion, which are often identified with national groups, have started flowing, often thinning these national boundaries. Transnationalism is considered the social phenomenon which encapsulates such social tendencies.

12). These movements' political and cultural ramifications have identified the refugee crisis as an essential question in understanding citizenship in contemporary times. To cite an example from the recent past, the Rohingya refugee crisis has redefined our understanding of the 'nation' and its borders, citizenship and also human rights concerns in the Asian region.¹³⁷

The renegotiations developed in the ideas of nation-state pose important questions regarding the criteria for citizenship. The nation, from its conception in 'homogenous time' and linguistic and cultural commonalities to the Indian situation of decolonisation and subsequent formation, has made possible constant reformulations in the idea of citizenship.¹³⁸ In India, like many other postcolonial countries, citizenship brought together the fragmented identities under the nation form.¹³⁹ However, the idea of citizenship in India has been going through various contestations owing to the fissures within the national identity.¹⁴⁰ Recently, the CAA and the proposed all-India NRC have attempted severe interference in granting citizenship to the immigrants from neighbouring countries and invited much criticism for its indefensible and inhuman arbitrariness.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷Rohingyas are one of the minority communities in Myanmar that have been denied citizenship and persecuted. Post their exodus from Myanmar in 2017, millions of Rohingyas live in Asian countries like Bangladesh and India as refugees. Their perilous journeys to these South Asian countries to escape from extreme poverty and impoverished living conditions have caught global attention. In order to further explore their condition as the 'people without a state,' see Chaudhury and Samaddar (2018).

¹³⁸Reflecting on the origins of nationalism in Western societies, Benedict Anderson explores how nations have been constituted through common cultural and capitalist artefacts. Anderson identifies these roots in 18th century Enlightenment ideals that lured the rise of nationalism with a gradual diminishing of religion. Anderson calls it a secular transformation that was necessitated by modernity. See Anderson (1991).

¹³⁹Anderson's argument was critiqued for its inability to capture the nationalistic tendencies in non-Western societies. For example, Partha Chatterjee explores how nationalism was developed among the culturally and linguistically fragmented Indian society (1993). According to Chatterjee, the construction of an authentic nationalism in India- one rooted in the people's experiences- requires an appreciation that the social whole can be seen only from fragmented perspectives, and there has been no single national culture. Thus, he conceptualises India's national identity as fragmented by bringing in the question of women, Dalits and peasants. Chatterjee also argues that one cannot arrive at a historically nuanced answer to the nature of nationalist discourse unless "we think of it as one of continuation peopled by several subjects, several consciousness" (217, 1993).

¹⁴⁰The non-proximity between nationalism in spirit and nationalism in content has been delineated in the dismantling of the postcolonial nation-state (Aloysius (1997); Pandian (2009)).

¹⁴¹While looking at the discussions on NRC in the north-eastern regions, the burgeoning of cross-border migration between Bangladesh and Assam has initiated introduction of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) initially in 1951 for the state of Assam in order to curb illegal migration and identify the Indian citizens who moved from present-day Bangladesh. In 2013, updating the list began with an initial draft coming out in December 2017 and the final list in July 2018.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 has caused one of the massive refugee crises in South Asia (Daiya 2008, 102). Often conceived in the official history as the ‘exchange of population’ or the ‘transfer of population,’ there was a large-scale movement across the newly formed borders of West Pakistan (Pakistan), India, and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) (102). Millions crossing the borders for life has been one of the recurring and haunting images which Partition has imprinted in the minds of these nations. Novels, films and other fictional representations have portrayed the movement as the breaking away of families and friendships.¹⁴² As previously discussed, the Partition studies in India have unravelled the continuing effects of Partition in the subcontinent. They have highlighted the importance of the constitutive migrations of 1947 and their impact on the postcolonial imagining of citizenship in the contemporary debates on citizenship, ethnicity and notions of belonging. The academic enquiries on Partition refugees have explored the ways in which their images have been constituted in the nationalist ideologies of India and Pakistan (Daiya 2008, 5). The feminist historiography of Partition has put forward the argument of women refugees being the anchoring point of nationhood in the newly formed nation-states of India and Pakistan (Butalia 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998). Particularly in India, refugees have become an important arena to draw on the national consciousness, especially in the debates around refugees in the eastern region. The self-identification with a newly achieved sense of nationality in a new land has to be explored to understand how the migrants from across the border experienced Partition. The partition refugees have often found themselves in an ambivalent position because of the immediacy with which national populations have been constituted and the compulsive ways the transferred population has to imagine the new sense of belonging. At a critical juncture of nation-building and state formation, these immigrated populations have negotiated with their identities in the process of ‘becoming’ citizens (Butalia 1998). Kavita Daiya (2008) identifies

¹⁴²For instance, *Garm Hava* [The Hot Winds 1973].

the sense of their “postcolonial belongings” as different from the usual discourse of refugee crisis which is often interpreted as conditions of “statelessness” (117). Placing ‘Partition refugees’ in the international discourse of refugee crisis, Daiya brings in the unique and liminal position of these refugees, given the case of them being the citizens of the nations to which they migrated (104). Daiya also points out the disparity in the refugee crisis of India and Pakistan. She notes that in Pakistan, the *Muhajirs* remain the ‘outsiders’ in contrast to the *Pathans* resulting in a political mobilisation as seen in the case of *Muhajir Qaumi* Movement (118).¹⁴³ Whereas in India, she observes, “the Hindu and Sikh refugees have been assimilated into the social fabric despite the initial hostility, poverty, hardship and envy they faced” (109). However, she rightly observes that “in the narration of the Partition experience in the public and political discourse, then, it was around the figure of the refugee that debates about citizenship, ethnicity and gender coalesced” (105).

Studies around the theme of the refugee crisis have remained an indispensable part of the repertoire of Partition narratives. Drawing on the themes of ethnicity, belonging and linguistic variables, these studies have explored the conflictual relationship between the refugee and the state as the central trope with which India, Pakistan and Bangladesh negotiated the afterlives of Partition (Daiya 2008). It has been argued that the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the declaration of Bangladesh as an independent nation-state in 1971 caused ruptures in the internal displacements across the newly formed nation-states (Chatterjee 2013, 294). Many attempts have also been made to understand the refugee question amidst the forced displacements during Partition, focusing on different regions and contexts. For instance, Gayatri Bhattacharyybortya (1988) and Anindita Ghoshal (2011) explored these questions in the context of Tripura, one of the north-eastern states of India which received refugees in large

¹⁴³*Pathans* are the Muslim community who inhabited the Punjab regions in the present-day Pakistan. The ostracisation meted out towards *Muhajirs* led to the political mobilization named *Muhajir Qaumi* Movement (MQM), claiming themselves the equal citizens of Pakistan (Zaidi 1991).

numbers from Bangladesh after Partition in 1947 and Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971. According to Ghoshal, "indeed, it is noteworthy that when communal frenzy overtook different parts of undivided India, Tripura remained insulated by and large" (2011, 22). She also points out the permeable nature of the newly created borders and observes:

after Partition, Tripura was bordered by Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet districts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Four-fifths (83 per cent) of Tripura's 1,001-km-long frontier constituted the border with erstwhile East Pakistan. But it was only an imaginary line drawn by Lord Cyril Radcliffe in 1946-47. In fact, that frontier was open and unguarded till the early 1980s (Ghoshal 2011, 1209).

Focusing on the cross-border movement across India and Bangladesh, Van Schendel and Abraham observe the transnational linkages between these nations and the nature of identities moving across their borders (2005). The pivot of their study is the nature of 'illegal' acts and 'illicit' movement happening across these borders. However, they also ponder on the complex histories of these geographical regions and analyse how the movement across these regions, divided by national borders at a specific juncture in history, contests and contradicts the legitimacy of these boundaries and the idea of citizenship (2005, 1- 37). Other studies on post-Partition cross-border migration in India have also attempted to problematise the coherency of national borders in terms of the working of religions, nations and capital (Sur 2021). These studies have highlighted the never-endingness of Partition by focusing on the myriad ways people experience the complexity of their past and present, which often transcend the boundaries of nation-states (Sur 2020). Often bearing the weight of nationhood, these borders witness the violent interplay of national histories and their everyday reciprocation in people's life.

One of the fundamental questions in the studies on Partition refugees is their representation where a binary being constituted as the non-migrant citizen and the Partition migrant (Schendel and Abraham 2005, 30- 31). The refugees are portrayed in the narratives of Partition in various manners. On the one hand, they are portrayed as inherently communal,

distinct from other citizens. On the other, they are depicted at the receiving end of sympathy and pity. Taking instances from the colonial and postcolonial news reporting on Partition refugee crisis and the looming communal violence during the period, Kavita Daiya propounds that “citizenship and refugee are opposing terms in the biopolitics of Indian nationality” (2008, 113). She elaborates on the way refugees were predominantly “represented, simultaneously as agents, victims, and exemplary citizens in the nation” (107). The Indian nation-state, often in its reiterations, have projected a paranoia of Muslim migrants as the testimony and agent of violent communalism where they remain an intrinsic part of what constitutes ‘national’ by simply being the ‘foreign’ (112). Thus, “the refugee becomes a de-privatized, public citizen-subject who infects the national body with a murderous communalism” (113).¹⁴⁴

Thus, contrary to the dominant policy discourse about refugees that casts them as victims, the depiction of refugees in journalism and oral accounts from this time also cast refugees as active agents of violence through their story telling, dispossessed looting and physical aggression (Daiya 2008, 111).

The Partition studies in India, despite their attempts to trace the histories of this catastrophic event and explore the resultant identity formations, have limited their discussions in the north-eastern and north-western regions of the country. These existing discussions have tried to understand the refugee question in Post-Independent India through an analysis of identity formations in the border regions. This leaves us with a restricted understanding of the role of Partition in shaping the refugee subjects in the southern part of the country as the studies delimit the vocabulary of identity formations and displacements engendered by Partition to specific geographies. Thus, the attempt here is to introduce ‘Paradesi’ and their experiences as

¹⁴⁴The present Home Minister of India who was then the All India President of the BJP, Amit Shah made a remark on 22 September 2018 that immigrants from Bangladesh are termites to be removed from the voter’s lists. He was referring to the NRC published in Assam, during a public meeting in Kota, Rajasthan (*The Hindu* 2018).

a political predicament imparted by Partition in a distant site like Kerala in order to retrieve the regional interventions in the story of Partition.

II. ‘Paradesi’- the Partition Refugee from Kerala

Kerala has a significant bearing on the discussions on transnational migration as Keralites constitute a considerable migrant population in countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. The geographical positioning of Kerala with access to sea routes has often been highlighted as the reason for the increased migration from the region, besides the centuries-long international trade relations and cosmopolitanism, which is marked by the plurality in religion and caste groups.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the region has stories of forced migration to narrate from British rule as many were compelled to migrate in order to meet the labour demand in other British colonies (Nair 1991; Oommen 2013). Similarly, displacements occurred due to colonial atrocities as many had to escape from the British force following their involvement in the anti-colonial resistances. Among these movements, an initial phase of migration to Karachi and other north-western parts of the subcontinent was triggered by such chaos that followed the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 (Khalidi 1998, 341; Menon 2019; Joseph 2017). Mappilas of Malabar exiled to Bombay and Karachi, failing to resist the repressive measures adopted by the British to crush the movement.

At the same time, the northern region of the subcontinent was the destination of internal migrants before independence. Major cities such as Madras, Bombay, Kolkata, and Delhi were the destinations for those who travelled in search of jobs from the region (Afsal and Reshmi 2020). Considerable part of migration to regions in current Pakistan also occurred when people started travelling in search of livelihood in the 1940s (Khalidi 1998, 341).¹⁴⁶ During this phase,

¹⁴⁵How the access to sea routes has shaped the history of the Malabar region has been of great academic interest. For instance, see Panikkar (1945); Gupta (1967); Kooria and Pearson (2018).

¹⁴⁶Apart from these labour migrations, Karachi had been the destination for educational explorations as evidenced by the movement of Christian nuns to the nursing colleges in Karachi and Islamabad This aspect of the migration from Kerala to Karachi has been pointed out to me by Prof. Michael Tharakan and I am indebted to him for the same.

Karachi and Dhaka became accidental destinations for many on their way to the Middle East, often due to perils of the travel or after being fooled by the fraudulent travel agents (Devasia 2019; Shahina 2011; Nair 2011). By the 1950s, Karachi became a hub of Keralites, especially the Mappilas from the northern part of Kerala (Devasia 2019).

In exploring the recurring impact of Partition in Kerala, the experiences of these migrants who travelled to the Indian subcontinent's north-western part are of greater significance. They predominantly belonged to the lower-class families in different parts of Malabar, who moved to Bombay, Dhaka and Karachi in search of a livelihood (Devasia 2019). Their familiarity with the language alleviated the process of uprooting as most of the travellers were fluent in Urdu or Arabic. Karachi became one of the frequently chosen destinations owing to the availability of comparatively high wages as well (2019). *Malayalee* migrants predominantly worked as tea sellers, *beedi* rollers and as labourers in small restaurants. Many of them were not directly involved in the cross-border migration that happened during Partition (Gill 2019). However, they shaped the Karachi public sphere immensely.¹⁴⁷ The Jama-at Association formed in Karachi in the 1930s substantiates the considerable presence of the migrants from Kerala in the region which necessitated an organisational strength. The association featured around 30,000 Keralites as its members in 1950 (Kutty 2011). As a result of these active movements across the border, there was a considerable migrant population from Kerala in Pakistan during its formation and even in the later years amounting to 6000 in 2019 (Gill 2019).

On the one hand, the uniqueness of this *Malayalee* migration to Pakistan and the public sphere they constituted in a 'foreign' land is often highlighted by the persona of Biyyathul Mohammed Kutty, popularly known as B. M. Kutty, a native of Tirur in the present district of Malappuram, Kerala, India, who migrated to Pakistan in 1949 (Kutty 2011). Being a non-

¹⁴⁷With popular food joints selling *Malayalee* cuisine and a Malayalam medium school, run by the Jama-at association of Keralites, these migrants turned citizens mark their presence in the public sphere of Karachi (News18.com 2020).

practicing Muslim, born in Kerala and an ardent follower of the Communist movement from its nascent years in the region, his travel to Pakistan often problematised the religious underpinnings of Pakistan in Indian nationalist consciousness. Kutty often projected his “love for geography” as a motivation to migrate to Pakistan and vehemently denied any religious motives (Kutty 2011, 5). Donning many prominent roles in his life, such as journalist, public servant and trade unionist, in the history of Pakistan’s politics, the presence of this Leftist from Kerala in Pakistan often invited curiosity and wonder. Throughout his life, B. M. Kutty tried to influence the political relations between India and Pakistan by taking efforts to establish a peaceful reconciliation.¹⁴⁸ His life in Pakistan is often a reflection of the possibility of a different relationship with the neighbouring nation, distant from the wounds left behind by Partition.

On the other hand, those who migrated from Kerala to Pakistan also include people who have found themselves in a precarious position across the national borders of these neighbouring countries. They migrated to Pakistan from Malabar during the significant years in the formation of nation-states in the subcontinent following which they were accidentally encumbered by the Pakistani citizenship as the acquisition of citizenship was introduced as an official criterion to remain in the newly formed nations. A vast majority of these migrants were illiterate and extremely poor, which prompted their migrations. Obtaining a Pakistani passport was the only way to visit their families back in Kerala, India, after the formation of the Indian nation-state. Most of these people opted for it without knowing that it would lead to relinquishing their Indian citizenship and rights (Devasia 2017). However, the antagonistic relationship between these two nations destroyed the dreams of a permanent return for these migrants. Unlike other migrants from Kerala to foreign lands, their journeys in search of better

¹⁴⁸B. M. Kutty was the secretary general of the Pakistan Peace Coalition, an action council formed in Karachi to monitor the armed conflicts in Pakistan, and between India and Pakistan. He worked hard towards the betterment of the movement of peace between India and Pakistan throughout his life (Menon 2019).

prospects to places like Lahore and Karachi had denied them the opportunity of a homecoming.¹⁴⁹ While the first generation of migrants who moved in the early decades of the twentieth century could not return to their native place in their lifetime, many others now live in their home state (India) on temporary visas under the perpetual threat of deportation to Pakistan. Their days in the homeland hang on the hopes of acquiring Indian citizenship. In India, they are leading the life of an unsolicited ‘foreigner’ after being denied the fundamental rights. Lack of an ‘identity’ (proof) restricts them from casting votes, opening bank accounts and travelling by trains or acquiring private properties as their existence is denied in India’s social and political life. While internal and international migration has been highlighted as the primary sources of social and economic capital of the state, these early migrants who went in search of better economic opportunities are now overlooked and neglected by both the central and the state governments.

As part of the present study, I have interviewed three Individuals who are Pakistani nationals by their passport but have cultural as well as familial roots in Kerala. They belong to a small town named Thalassery in the Kannur district of Kerala, India where there are at least twenty families of similar precarious identity.¹⁵⁰ As discussed before, these individuals migrated to Pakistan during the years that immediately preceded and followed Partition, in search of a life which would sustain the lives back home. They have now returned to their native place in Kerala with at least two generations of family after holding Pakistani citizenship for years to find themselves as ‘Paradesi’ [foreigners] in the land of their origin.

The interviewees include the septuagenarian Kunju Muhammad, a first-generation migrant who travelled to Karachi and returned to Kerala in 2005 with three generations of his

¹⁴⁹How the migration to the Middle East, popularly termed as Gulf migration has been a significant arena to imagine a particular cultural identity of *Malayalee* for at least three decades since the 1970s has been argued in Radhakrishnan (2009). However, the accumulation of wealth and the changes in the social hierarchies developed with the help of Gulf money often induced negative caricatures of these migrants in the popular cinema as an affluent but uneducated and extravagant man (Samseer 2014).

¹⁵⁰The interviews were conducted at respondents’ homes in Kannur, Kerala on 23rd and 24th June 2018.

family.¹⁵¹ The second family belongs to Fathima, a second-generation Pakistani citizen unlike Kunju Muhammad. Born to Majeed, who migrated to Pakistan in the early 1950s, Fathima grew up in Pakistan until her parents returned to Kerala in the early 2000s. She has been uprooted from a ‘foreign’ land to live as a ‘foreigner’ in her parents’ homeland. Manoj, the third interviewee, is also a second-generation migrant who shares a different story of assimilation in the (religious) community and the nation. Through a series of personal interviews, I have tried to capture their life after ‘homecoming.’ The attempt is to understand the ‘taboo’ forced upon them by the government and society.

Kunju Muhammad, from the present Kannur district of Kerala, is one of the early migrants who crossed borders in search of green pastures in the late 1940s.¹⁵² In 1948, he travelled to Karachi with the help of a relative to resolve the financial difficulties at home. The relative was running a tea shop in Karachi during the time.¹⁵³ Though it was after Independence, he remembers the porous borders that allowed free movement till the mid-1950s to the current Bangladesh in the east and the north-western regions of Punjab in the west. From the mid-1950s, the borders of India and Pakistan got rigid, with nation-states taking their form and the consequent strengthening of the ideas of citizenship. As recalled by Kunju Muhammad:

During [47] and all, there were no difficulties in travelling to the north. India and Pakistan might have been formed, but borders were open, and we moved back and forth easily till [50s]. Once they issued this thing called passport after [50]s, crossing the border has been a task in itself.

In 1955, when independent India passed the Citizenship Act, travelling to India without a passport became impossible which forced these migrants to obtain Pakistani passports.¹⁵⁴ The

¹⁵¹The names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

¹⁵²The resident of Kannur District, Kerala, India, is one of the eldest among the ‘Paradesi’ figures in Kerala whom I interviewed in June 2018 at his residence in Kerala.

¹⁵³Kunju Muhammad couldn’t remember the details of this relative’s travel to Karachi, though he could recollect that he had been well versed in Urdu and had a limited social circle in the region as evident of his years of acquaintance in Karachi.

¹⁵⁴The Citizenship Act which outlined the parameters for the acquisition and termination of Indian citizenship was passed in the Indian parliament on 2nd May 1955. On the guidelines which define the Indian citizenship, see <https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/1955/E-2210-1955-0023-101599.pdf> (accessed on July 10, 2021).

perils of frequent travel and a flourishing business forced Kunju Muhammad to settle down in Karachi with his family and the children growing as the citizens of a different nation. They made brief visits to Kerala on short visas, though very rarely. According to Kunju Muhammad, the movement became difficult and the visa procedure a harrowing ordeal whenever the political relations between the two nations worsened, especially after the consecutive wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. Kunju Muhammad observes:

Haven't the countries become enemies later? Then, the visa application process has been very difficult. We had to go to these offices umpteen number of times and there were several months of waiting to get it done. Do you think it was easy for people like us who hardly went to school to get any sense of these things?

As revealed in Kunju Muhammad's narration, the decision to return to Kerala permanently in 2005 has transformed their lives forever. On returning to their homeland, these migrants have been denied Indian citizenship and are forced to lead an alienated life, being 'Paradesi' in their homeland. He narrated a turbulent part of his life, where he spent long years in exile when he extended his sojourn beyond the permitted time.

Is this a life at all? We don't have any [identity] cards. So, we don't vote, can't even open bank accounts. Leave all of it. If I want to go somewhere, can we get into a train without the card? There were times, when the visa got over, we all went into hiding. Days and nights just went in the fear of being caught. I have seen my friends being taken away to be sent across the borders!

'Paradesi' figures like Kunju Muhammad embodies the perpetual fear of sending away from his homeland as his application for citizenship is still in the process. The persistent surveillance and routine reporting at the police stations and the interrogations they face whenever there is a crisis at the borders or when the relationship between India and Pakistan worsens, have become the necessary ordeal of their lives. It has problematised their sense of belonging by creating a sense of aversion in the others towards the 'Paradesi.'

Fathima, who is in her early forties, is a second-generation Pakistani migrant. She has spent most of her life in Pakistan and returned to Kerala mainly to find a groom for her younger siblings. While Kunju Muhammad's story revealed the relations between the state and the 'Paradesi,' Fathima's experiences highlighted the discrimination they encountered within the family and the community as she recollects:

My parents wanted to come back thinking their home is here and so does our kith and kin. But after coming here, things seem to be otherwise. There was hesitancy from relatives and other acquaintances to accept as one among them. When it was the time for my sister's marriage, even the relatives were reluctant in helping us find a groom as we are from Pakistan.

Apart from the social ostracisation, financial difficulties also put 'Paradesi' in a vulnerable state often making them incapable of the lengthy legal battles for citizenship. Their helplessness arises from the lack of familial or community support due to their complex identity.

Manoj, like Fathima, is a second-generation Partition migrant who is in his mid-forties. His father migrated to Lahore during the early 1950s. Unlike the majority of 'Paradesi' population, he belongs to the Hindu religious community. Manoj, along with his mother and siblings, remained in Kerala during his childhood. As previously narrated by Kunju Muhammad, the strengthening of borders and growing animosity between the two nations, especially after the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, forced the families of these migrants to settle down in Pakistan as citizens. Manoj and his family returned to Kerala in 1998, following his father's death. According to Manoj, who is still in the legal battle for Indian citizenship, the migrants who face the citizenship crisis are predominantly Muslims as they form a significant part of the 'Paradesi' population. Manoj's narration of his difficulties after returning to Kerala highlighted the bureaucratic troubles of delayed processing of the visa applications rather than ostracisation within the community and society.

This has been our home, no matter how long we stayed afar. Relatives, friends and acquaintances see me as one among them. There is no doubt about it. But the troubles began when these paper works started. Initial years have gone in applying for the extension of visas. Now, I'm running after the application for citizenship. Even if I think we can get away without a passport, there are other practical difficulties because we don't have [id] cards.

However, he denied any experience of social ostracisation as he was welcomed in his family and locality. Unlike the families of Kunju Muhammad and Fathima, Manoj denies the social stigma of being a citizen of Pakistan as his religious identity allows an easy assimilation to the majority community of India. Daiya has also pointed out this difference in the process of assimilation where the Hindus who migrated to India after Partition were able to find a place in society eventually (2008, 109). The differences in the experiences of Manoj when compared to the 'Paradesi' figures who belong to the minority community brings in the possibility of analysing the regional variation in the marginalisation of Muslim identity. It challenges the homogenous conception of 'Paradesi' figures where their religious identity repeatedly questions their sense of belonging. It also underlines how the regional othering of the Muslim identity adds on to the nationalist ideologies of Partition.

Despite having their strong roots in Kerala, 'Paradesi' figures like Kunju Muhammad and their later generations who shifted to their homeland suffered alienation and ostracisation due to their foreign identity and the particular imagining of Pakistan in the Indian nationalist consciousness. They are often perceived with doubtful loyalties making their everyday life impossible even in the communitarian public realm of Kerala. Rather than the official procedures of obtaining visas and passports, the everyday partisan struggles of assimilation mark the complexities of 'Paradesi' life. Kunju Muhammad's grandchildren, third-generation Pakistani citizens, struggled to obtain admissions in schools and colleges and Fathima's siblings find it difficult to get marriage alliances. Adding to it, the constant enquiries from the Ministry of External Affairs and the police department perpetually frame 'Paradesi' in a dark zone against the nation, continuously attempting to destabilise the former. However, such

discriminatory treatments were not an experience exclusively faced by the ‘Paradesi’ figures in Kerala. The Pakistani passport owners, particularly from the Muslim community, in other parts of India also face similar issues. The international and national media has reported on these ‘no-where’ souls who struggle to reconnect to their families in India.¹⁵⁵ However, such biased treatments in visa procedures are not restricted to the Pakistani nationals who hope for a permanent return to India but are also highlighted as a concern among the tourists internationally. In 2010, the UK government raised their concern highlighting the ethnic discrimination faced by the UK citizens of Pakistan origin in their visa procedure for travelling to India.¹⁵⁶ The government officials pointed it as a visible instance of racial discrimination that violates the human right laws of the UK and European Union. Nevertheless, such ethnic prejudices practised by India, retained ‘Paradesi’ away from their ‘home,’ unsettling their belonging forever. It points to the Indian nationalistic discourse, which antagonises its neighbour to the extent that Pakistan and its people remain ‘foreign’ irrespective of multiple ways of shared past and histories. Daiya argues:

The Partition constitutes a field of transformation and a discourse that became the condition of possibility for the ethnicization of citizenship and belonging in postcolonial South Asia. It also created the framework for the recent resurgence of gendered, ethnic nationalism in India and the Indian diaspora (2008, 5).

Such prolonged impact of Partition in the political life of the Subcontinent continues to shape the ideas of citizenship in this country, as evidenced by the CAA and NRC. The decision to grant Long Term Visas as pathways to citizenship to the non- Muslim communities from

¹⁵⁵Muhammad Viqar Sharif, is born in the Middle East and has acquired a Pakistani nationality as his parents migrated to Lahore in the 1950s from Hyderabad, India. Having his familial roots here, he has been wanting to return to India permanently. However, he has been facing difficulties due to his Pakistani identity (Sarwar 2018).

¹⁵⁶The international media like *The Guardian* has reported on the discriminatory visa policies in India that affected the UK citizens who wanted to visit India for business and study purposes among others (Wintemute 2010a; 2010b).

neighbouring nations reveals how the troubled histories associated with Partition still shape our ideas of citizenship.¹⁵⁷

III. People sans a Nation: *Paradesi* and the Filmic Representation of ‘No-where’ Lives

One of the significant aspects of Partition is how it has disrupted the cultural imagining of one’s belonging in relation to the variables of locality or neighbourhood, language and, most importantly, the nation (Daiya 2007, 116). The ‘Paradesi’ figures opting to return to their roots, to their homeland after generations, have been a unique case of them asserting their sense of belonging simultaneously in the regional and national contexts. In such a scenario, it can be argued that the ‘Paradesi’ identities negotiate with two kinds of nationalism—pan Indian national and sub-national. They resort to their cultural belonging as the paramount criterion to belong to the region and the nation. However, the nation-state and the regional context of Kerala, pendulating between the constitutional provisions of secularism and that of the territorial ethnicisation called Partition, place ‘Paradesi’ in an ambivalent position by denying them an easy assimilation. Thus, their displacement, not necessarily during Partition, has continued to affect their lives, as an experience central to their relationship with the nation.

However, their ‘divided lives’ haven’t brought much vehement public discussion in Kerala, though the return of ‘Paradesi’ figures began in the late 70s and 80s, and their consequent attempts to stay back on long visas. The release of the movie *Paradesi* [Foreigner], directed by P. T. Kunju Muhammad in 2007, was crucial in initiating a public discussion on

¹⁵⁷As per the provisions provided in the CAA to provide citizenship to the religious minorities in Pakistan and other neighbouring countries, the Government of India has introduced the Long Term Visa (LTV). This will provide them with an interim period, for proceeding with the application for citizenship. As part of this provision, migrants can obtain PAN cards, Adhaar Cards and buy property in India. LTVs have been introduced in the country since 2011 during the Manmohan Singh government and many of the ‘Paradesi’ figures have been benefited from it. However, under the present regime, with the enactment of the CAA, the policy of LTV has been predominantly helped the non-Muslim migrants (*The Economic Times* 2018). Refer https://www.mha.gov.in/PDF_Other/LTV_09062017.pdf (accessed on September 9, 2021).

the conditions of ‘Paradesi’ in Kerala.¹⁵⁸ Noted for its politically significant theme and craft, the film portrays the life of *Malayalee* Pakistani citizens, who had crossed borders in search of livelihood from northern Malabar, Kerala.¹⁵⁹ Though the struggles of ‘Paradesi’ couldn’t generate much discussion in Kerala’s otherwise politically vibrant public sphere for the past decades, the film was effective in generating debates and discussions on these precarious identities (Gopalakrishnan 2006).

The film revolves around the life of Valiyakath Moosa (portrayed by Mohanlal, one of the celebrated actors of the present Malayalam film industry), narrating three stages of his life. It is Moosa’s journey from Eranad in northern Malabar to Karachi in the 1940s and his life after returning to Kerala as a Pakistan citizen that forms the narrative. The film portrays the mental and legal battle he goes through because of his ‘accidental’ identity as a Pakistan citizen and the harassment he faces at the hands of the state and society. Interestingly, the protagonist Moosa hails from Eranad, the region that witnessed the Malabar Revolt of 1921 in its total momentum. Thus, he is placed within the historical significance of anti-colonial struggles in the region. The movie also reveals Moosa’s father to be one of the great martyrs of the Battle of Pookkottur in 1921, in which the Mappilas fought against the British.¹⁶⁰ Thus, *Paradesi*

¹⁵⁸P.T Kunju Muhammad is an eminent scriptwriter, film director and producer in Malayalam, mainly contributing to the ‘parallel’ cinema with his films marked for their artistic quality and socially and politically poignant themes. He has also been a Member of the Legislative Assembly as a Left independent candidate. He is one of the founding members of the Malayalam television channel *Kairali*, an initiative of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala. His debut directorial venture in films was *Magrib* in 1993, followed by *Garshom* in 1999 and *Paradesi* in 2007. He also directed the biographical movie *Veeraputhran* in 2011 based on the life of Mohammed Abdul Rahman, the eminent freedom fighter and leader from the Muslim community of Kerala.

¹⁵⁹Released on 24 October 2007, *Paradesi* is produced by Antony Perumbavoor under the banner of *Ashirvad Films*. The film presented an ensemble of star-cast including Mohanlal, Siddique, Lakshmi Gopalswami, Padmapriya and Jagathy Sreekumar. Many awards were bestowed on the film in both the National and State Film Awards. Pattanam Rashid won the Best Make-up Artist title in the National Film awards 2007 for *Paradesi*. In the Kerala State Film Awards 2008, Mohanlal received the award for Best Actor, P.T Kunju Muhammad for Best Story, Pattanam Rashid for Best Make-up Artist and Jagathy Sreekumar received Special Jury Mention.¹⁵⁹ The film received recognition in various international film festivals as well.

¹⁶⁰The Battle of Pookkottur is a significant moment during the Malabar Rebellion in which a severe clash occurred between the British force and the Mappilas of Malabar on 26th August 1921 at Pookkottur in present-day district of Malappuram and both the side suffered calamities.

addresses the irony of Moosa's 'foreign' identity where his roots are intrinsically related to the political history of the region and the nation which otherwise labels him as foreign. As the film depicts the life of Moosa from the 14- year- old boy who travels to Karachi, to the Pakistan citizen who struggles to get his Indian citizenship, it speaks of various factors pertaining to the experiences of being 'Paradesi.' The character of Moosa, in multiple levels, can be related to senior 'Paradesi' figures like Kunju Muhmmad who had to cross borders in search of better prospects.

One of the critical things to be noted here is the accidentality in which they acquire citizenship. All the characters pushed into this precarious position are presented unaware of the consequences of availing a 'foreign' passport. The reason for rejecting Moosa's application for citizenship is the lack of evidence to prove that his Pakistani identity wasn't a conscious decision. As discussed earlier, many of the 'Paradesi' figures who travelled to Karachi and Lahore became Pakistani citizens unintentionally. Lack of sufficient awareness about the complications of acquiring Pakistani citizenship and poverty forced many of them to remain in a foreign land without realizing it would cost them their Indian identity. As the families of 'Paradesi' figures narrated, even Karachi wasn't an intended destination in their movements. They worked wherever they found opportunities and better wages. However, Karachi attracted many of them with more job opportunities. The movement without an intention to settle down has always been cited by 'Paradesi' in their fight for Indian citizenship as evidenced in a case filed in the Supreme Court of India.¹⁶¹ It has also highlighted the way 'Paradesi,' and the circumstances of their travel initiate a new discourse around migration and the criteria for

¹⁶¹A petition filed on behalf of Kulathil Mammu vs. the State of Kerala in the Supreme Court of India in 1966, initiated a discussion on the term 'migration,' pondering its plausible meanings involving a strong intention to reside permanently. Kulathil Mammu, a resident of Kozhikod district, travelled to Pakistan at the age of 12 in 1948. He permanently returned to India in 1964 and found to be living in Kerala without 'valid' documents. He was punished to return to Pakistan, following which he filed a case claiming his Indian citizenship. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/887029/> (accessed on August 18, 2021).

citizenship by focusing on the living conditions and related intentions which trigger such movements.

According to K. N. Panikkar, one of the significant subtexts that the film attempts to problematise through the figure of 'Paradesi' is 'State' (Panikkar 2008, 19). Like any other refugee narrative, the ruptured relation between the state and 'Paradesi' becomes the anchoring point for the film. The police being the quintessential presence of the state, it is through their constant surveillance that 'Paradesi' confronts and experiences the dominant and impeding nation. Police remains an intimidating presence that question their belonging ceaselessly and the tortures inflicted on 'Paradesi' by the police is suggestive of the exclusive and menacing presence of the state in their life. The film also portrays the vulnerable financial conditions in which many of these migrants live, making them incapable of legal battles for citizenship which includes the routine bribery demands from the police. Constant surveillance they face and the endless presence of police in their lives lead to a social stigma affecting their familial and social relationships. Such alienation often leads to the kind of psychological trauma experienced by the characters in the movie. It also depicts with utmost sensitivity how women are affected in these circumstances as a 'Paradesi' herself and being part of their family. For instance, the character Khadeeja who is married to a merchant based in Karachi is forced to leave her home to stay with her husband and ends up being a Pakistani citizen. Her 'Paradesi' identity denies her from returning home even from a troubled marriage, and she ends her life in a nowhere land amidst the definitions of marriage, family and nation.

The film has been acclaimed for the way it contested the dominant thesis of Partition being a northern debate (Gopalakrishnan 2019). It explores those hidden chapters in our vernacular histories, which have been hitherto marginalised and suppressed in the dominant historiography of the nation. The faultlines in the nation-state are unravelled through the figure of 'Paradesi' as they travel through two phases in their lives as a migrant who moved across

regions in search of livelihood and a 'Paradesi' entangled in the questions of nation, borders and citizenship. The spaces the film problematises are national, the national ideas of being secular and its abstract notions of citizenship. As noted by Panikkar, culture becomes one of the important subtexts that the film discusses (2008, 20). One of the dominant strains in the discussions around the demand for Partition has been the existence of two religiously oriented cultures whose transition to one national identity is improbable. However, 'Paradesi' challenges this assumption through their eternal longing to return to the land of their cultural belonging. As Valiyakath Moosa identifies himself as 'Eranadukaran,' (a native of Eranad in Kerala) his idea of nation juxtaposes with the ideas of family, language, region and culture rather than abstract borders and verified documents.

However, critical studies have noted that, although the film ventures to challenge the colonial and nationalistic conceptions of citizen and communities, it fails to transcend the same (Joseph 2008, 45). For instance, the film attempts a humanistic critique of the insensitive and arbitrary manner in which the nation brands people as citizens. Even while despising the reality of 'Paradesi,' it reiterates the nationalist thesis of Partition being an accidental decision that made the Muslim lives in the subcontinent terrible rather than giving them the promised land. In this context, the film has tried to showcase the resentment and incomprehensibility of ordinary people with the larger political decisions and its consequences in their life. When the character, Karadan Abdul Rahiman asks Usha that "are you here to help me the way Jinnah helped Muslims in 1948?," the movie depicts Partition as a wrong judgment Jinnah made for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Thus, the film locates the discussions around 'Paradesi' in a humanitarian realm, as it imposes a selective amnesia about the particular historical trajectories through which these identities are constituted.

The cinematic representation and my conversations with the 'Paradesi' figures reveal how their plight often gained attention in the humanitarian concerns it invoked. Amidst the

neglect and betrayal from many sides, the discussions on the ‘Paradesi’ question revolve around the everyday issues of growing age, ailing body, denial of educational opportunities and marriage prospects and economic insecurities than identifying and placing these problems in the particular historical context to which they can be traced. The later effort gains significance when we realise that even the ‘Paradesi’ migrants share an uncritical ignorance regarding the social ostracisation they experience. The humanitarian vantage point, rather than identifying the historical and the political gravity of their condition and the denial of their justifiable right to become part of their homeland, has taken the ‘Paradesi’ debates into the realm of rights discourses. It rejects the possibilities of analysing ‘Paradesi’ as a political subject, problematised by the particular historical junctures in the process of nation-building to which their destinies are attached. Nevertheless, the historical reality of the ‘Paradesi,’ I argue, can be identified beneath this layer of such ‘everyday’ concerns. Besides the humanitarian explanations of their living conditions, an exploration of the political subjectivity of ‘Paradesi’ is crucial in tracing the contemporary reincarnations of Partition in the Kerala public sphere. Furthermore, it helps in locating this particular subjectivity in the communitarian public sphere of Kerala in order to problematise the same.

IV. ‘Paradesi:’ A Contested Political Subjectivity

The figure of ‘Paradesi’ is a perpetually displaced figure from both the nation and community, as revealed in their experiences. Owing to the doubts over loyalty, s/he becomes inserted into a circuit of becoming; for the nation, ‘Paradesi’ represents the threatening recalcitrant figure disloyal to the national community or its sub-national regional state variant. ‘Paradesi’ is continuously castigated through social ostracisation and bureaucratic trials and hence, internally suffers a state of non-belongingness. Unlike the refugee question in the case of Rohingyas, non-belongingness here points to a poignant state of being into which one is

inserted through a continuous state of rejection, suspicion and surveillance. In addition, the emotional turbulence an individual faces from one's own family as they see him or her as a liability also contribute to this non-belongingness of 'Paradesi' in their homeland. This discrimination forces one to become a member of the affectionate community where family, relatives and friends and the locality become essential parameters. Thus, the search for rootedness is another way of continuously exploring one's very existence, materially and beyond. The dislocation manifests into a search to locate oneself, and the search in itself transforms into a process of becoming and defining one's existence at the spatial crossroads of the nation, state and community.

'Paradesi,' instead of being simply the other of the nation and a member of the (regional) community, represents a state of being that directly attempts to co-relate with both the forms of belonging. In that sense, 'Paradesi' is doubly marked with a (foreign) national identity and a (regional) cultural identity. However, these conflicting identities are simultaneously erased and hence, the figure is left without being appropriated entirely in both locations. While 'Paradesi' is a recalcitrant figure for the nation, he becomes a liminal internal figure for the religious community. Despite its problematic existence owing to the national and regional othering, the Muslim community in Kerala resides within a crucial vortex of minority status, secular politics and electoral success. 'Paradesi,' on the other hand, owing to the double displacement, cannot be part of either the religious community in Kerala or the national community of India as his problematic and 'dubious' identity makes the figure less dependable in both collectives. Though religion appears as a better location for the 'Paradesi,' his/her 'foreign-ness' translate into a risk factor for the Muslim community in Kerala. Thus, 'Paradesi' emerges as a fleeting figure struggling to be appropriated by a regional discourse in order to be recognised and accepted as a social being within the national discourse of citizenship.

The questions of citizenship and the constitution of ‘strangers’ and ‘foreigners’ within the newly fabricated borders of the nation-state enables the conceptualisation of ‘Paradesi’ in a transnational scenario. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of ‘biopolitics’ which identified the stake of people’s lives in the mechanisms of power, Agamben brings out a theoretical paradigm for the modern nation-state by unveiling ‘bare life’ as a new political subject (1998, 73; 2005, 6). Rather identified as a “threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism,” the state of exception corresponds to “an emptiness of law,” which has become one of the ways in which the state apparatus intervened in the lives of its citizens (2005, 3). According to Agamben, ‘bare life’ subjects are constituted by the laws of the modern state as different from bios/ citizens (1998, 73). Thus, ‘Paradesi’ becomes a ‘bare life’ who is denied the rights and freedom guaranteed by the Indian constitution. Simultaneously, ‘Paradesi’ is translated as a new political subject in Kerala’s public sphere with the complex identity of Pakistani nationality. Their presence and their experiences problematise the claimed ‘communitarian’ consciousness of Kerala. The legal and social ostracisation meted out towards ‘Paradesi,’ and the looming threat of deportation to Pakistan make them the examples of ‘barelife’ citizens. Modern authoritarian states have been deploying this machinery to control borders and also the lives within the borders. As Agamben puts it, “the modern totalitarianism can be defined, as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination of not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who, for some reasons cannot be integrated into the political system” (2005, 2). ‘Paradesi,’ located within a condition devoid of any political and legal rights are examples of “barelife” where they are constantly living under the surveillance of the state and the permanent threat of deportation to Pakistan.

Within the prevalent discourse of Partition developed simultaneously with the nationalist discourse, a distinctive social type has been produced in the image of the ‘Paradesi’ as evidenced in their experiences. Etienne Balibar talks about the dubious yet significant relationship between borders and the construction of ‘strangers’ concerning the discourse of citizenship (2006). Balibar points out how the historical categories of “strange” and “enemy” are inherent in the structures of nation-project (2006, 4). Drawing on the example of European citizenship, he discusses how it undermines certain borders and validates or fortifies others; how certain borders are bound to be dissymmetric for certain people and in the due process, some strangeness becomes more assimilated while others become strangely foreign. For instance, the national borders encountered by ‘Paradesi’ in their homecoming are not only the geo-political boundaries of India and Pakistan. The prevalent nationalist mentalities have hindered them from being the rightful citizens of their homeland. Moreover, their relation with Pakistan is always perceived with suspicion and prejudices. Thus, the boundaries that determine the plight of these ‘Paradesi’ are not only the geographical borders of India and Pakistan but also the prejudices fostered by the nationalistic histories of Partition and its repeated imagining of Pakistan as the ‘communal’ other of the ‘secular’ India.

In the process of creating ‘strangers,’ there is a simultaneous reiteration of the ‘national’ in its opposition. As these individuals negotiate with the politically and socially forged strangeness, the traditional patterns of exclusion that contradict the equality associated with modern nation projects become visible. As a consequence, the category of the ‘national’ (or the self) becomes split and subject to the dissolving action of ‘internal borders’ mirroring the inequalities and differences within. Thus, irrespective of the cultural commonalities ‘Paradesi’ figures claim in their fight to be the rightful citizens of the country, they are differentiated in the public realms of life. The sub-national identity projected by Kerala, along with the sense of being part of the nation, is one of the essential factors for the cultural coexistence in the region.

However, irrespective of having these cultural and linguistic commonalities, 'Paradesi' remains outside both national and the regional boundaries owing to their complex positioning in the national imaginings of the 'self.'

While formulating a 'self' and 'subjectivity' in an anthropological enquiry into the questions of violence, Veena Das attempts to differentiate the ways in which a political identity has been conceived for the survivors of Partition violence and those of 1984 Sikh riots (2007). She observes a differentiating feature in the political subjectivities of the survivors of Partition and anti-Sikh riots in 1984. The part of Partition survivor's self, which is shaped by violence, is situated in "the shadow of ghostly past" in contrast to the survivors of the 1984 riots where their survivor identity was inextricably connected to the context of "making the everyday inhabitable" (2007, 216). Similarly, the shared narratives on 'Paradesi' figures highlight their everyday struggles of assimilation. It unravels the possibility of identifying unexplored and distinctive identities associated with the experience of Partition. Deviating from the victim-survivor dynamic associated with violence and the minoritised Muslim subjectivity stigmatised in the nationalist narratives, 'Paradesi' becomes the vernacular testimony of the afterlives of Partition. Their struggle to accommodate within the boundaries of new nations by questioning the secular nature of these borders and, by reasserting the sense of their belonging, they manipulate the ethnicisation of national boundaries imparted by Partition.

Das brings in the possibility of building multiple subjectivities around the 'event' through the example of the female survivors of the 1984 Riots who are the "symbolic representation in the collective imaginaire" of what constitutes the riot than being the explicit presences in the narrativisation of violence (2007, 217). It challenges the singularity of the event and, by contesting the dominant narrative, unfolds the possibilities of bringing forth the manifold meanings such historical junctures create in the lives of the people. Das observes:

It seems to me that this form of creating oneself as a subject by embracing the signs of subjection gives a very different direction to the meaning of being a

victim.... For what the women were able to “show” was not a standardized narrative of loss and suffering but a project that can be understood only in the singular through the image of reinhabiting the space of devastation *again* (2007, 217).

Similarly, the identity of ‘Paradesi’ and their experiences constitute one of the ways in which the sub-national contexts like Kerala experience Partition. As Das rightly remarks, “the meaning of an event in terms of its location in the everyday as presence, resistance, and cultural codes,” becomes the spectral presence of historical processes like Partition (217). Such varied meanings challenge the temporality and spatiality associated with these historical events, as exemplified by ‘Paradesi,’ problematising the geographically contingent Partition narratives with north-west and north-east India as their locus. According to Das:

The terrains on which these events were located crisscrossed several institutions, moving across family, community, bureaucracy, courts of law, the medical profession, the state, and multinational corporations. A description of these critical events helps form an ethnography which makes an incision upon all these institutions together, so that their mutual implications in the events are foregrounded during the analysis (Das 1995, 6).

In like manner, ‘Paradesi’ becomes the site where the crisscrossing of several discourses and institutions related to Partition can be traced. From the bureaucratic trials to the years of legal battles and the everyday struggles of assimilation, the lifeworlds of ‘Paradesi’ mark significant arenas in the post-Partition experience. While the regional affiliations with which they negotiate their sense of belonging remain the central theme in their life story, their everyday struggle of assimilation brings in several other institutions they encounter as part of their ‘foreign’ identity. Policing from the government and ostracisation in schools and other public places enable the intersection of these institutions to their complex identity and history. Moreover, they bring in the stigmatisation experienced by minorities since Partition, thereby making the impact such prejudices have in the sub-national contexts visible. As Das elaborates, new anthropological objects, like ‘Paradesi,’ are not only formed by the critical events but

rather shaped by the experiences of living in contemporary India while being associated with these events (1995, 5). As observed by Das, 'Paradesi,' is rather constituted by the ideas represented by Partition in contemporary Indian society. Moreover, their positioning in Kerala's otherwise secular communitarian space contributes to their identity, allowing them to assert a strong regional identity through cultural and linguistic factors. In doing so, they challenge the 'exceptional' realm of Kerala's communitarian public sphere by marking their presence as the ghostly presences of a past which continue to affect the way communities and identities are adopted within the nation.

In Das's argument of women being the active participants in the Partition violence, "the sufferings located in the individual biographies become transformed into social texts" (1995, 2). Similarly, the experiences of 'Paradesi' figures like Kunju Muhammad, among others, reveal the replication of nationalist discourses of Partition in its sub-national imaginings. These are the testimonies that depict how the region is always embedded in the nation. In her enquiries into the critical events in the histories of India, Das observes how "critical event redefined the traditional categories" (Das 1995, 6). In the aftermath of such events, new forms were acquired by various political actors such as religious communities or caste groups (6). In this analysis, Partition is identified as one of the critical events in the trajectory of the Indian nation-state as it becomes the context for the mediation of new identities by various political communities concerning the nation (6). 'Paradesi', in ideation of the minoritising of the Muslim community and the intensified othering of Pakistan, emerges as a new site in which Partition and its impact in sub-national contexts can be understood. In Kerala, these figures redefine the traditional categories of communities and their loyalties, on which the region anchors its virtue of political secularism.

According to Das, the women survivors of Partition violence often transgress the national definitions of community, honour and loyalty through their attachment towards their abductors

from the ‘rival’ community (1995, 9). Thus, “these women, by definition, escaped being inscribed in history, they must remain an enigma to the orders of the state and the family” (9). Similarly, ‘Paradesi,’ by not choosing the rigidity of borders and the categories of citizenship but adhering to their sense of belonging in terms of language and culture, rejects the state’s notions of citizenship. Hence, ‘Paradesi’ also stands outside the parameters of the nation, remaining an enigma to the notions of citizenship. They challenge the authenticity of national borders, as the nation happened amidst their experiences of displacement and resettlement. Similarly, ‘Paradesi’ inhabits ‘unfamiliar spaces’ in the community history of the nation as well as that of Kerala. While perpetuating the genesis of stigmatisation and minoritisation imparted by Partition on the Muslims post-independence India, they also point towards the infiltration of such thought mentalities in the erstwhile imaginations of Partition in Kerala.

One of the prolonging impacts Partition has impinged on the Indian nation-state has been the question of the minority belonging. The identity formations in the post-Partition scenario have been inextricably related to Muslim subjectivity, irrespective of their physical landscape. This chapter has attempted to explore ‘Paradesi,’ as a political subjectivity, impinged by Partition in the vernacular context of Kerala. In the process, the chapter has explored ‘Paradesi,’ as a Partition migrant and established these figures as the testimonies of Partition’s continuing spectre in the region. The chapter has argued that ‘Paradesi’ through their complex identity in the history of communalism in India forms an anomaly in Kerala’s ‘exceptional’ secular domain. However, they are a significant part of the histories of migration and communal negotiations within Kerala as they assert their sense of belonging through their regional affiliations. Moreover, the ‘Paradesi’ question validates how the vernacular imaginings of Partition are inextricably related to the local histories of communities and belonging. The attempt has also addressed the question of citizenship in the historical context of Partition for

the minoritised Muslim subject. Representation and discussions of these ‘Paradesi’ figures in the public sphere, in many ways, mark and validate the nationalist tendencies of minoritising and othering the Muslim identity. It also demonstrates the ‘loss of their belonging’ in the postcolonial secular space of Indian nation. ‘Paradesi’ narratives and their plight leave room for interpreting the historical reality of their (un)belonging within the community, as they have been perceived with doubtful loyalties in both the regional and national scenarios. The significant aspect of the ‘Paradesi’ experience is the persistence of Partition, which has been perpetuated in the regional context of Kerala. They substantiate the spectral presence of the catastrophic moment, which is continuing even in its regional contexts. The particular case of ‘Paradesi,’ while being served as the testimony of Partition in Kerala, also reflects the geopolitical unboundedness of the region and its negotiation with national boundaries. Focusing on the migratory politics that ‘Paradesi’ represents, the chapter has problematised the fetishism of national borders. While tracing these experiences, the chapter has also analysed the ‘exceptional’ communitarian realm of Kerala and observes that the experiences of ‘Paradesi’ validate how the ideas of Partition and Pakistan remain communalised and othered even in the communitarian public discourse of Kerala. It also substantiates how the nationalist histories of Partition and the othering of Muslims have figured in the constitution of communities in its sub-national contexts. However, experiences of ‘Paradesi,’ though primarily shaped by the politics of Partition, simultaneously negotiate with the regional histories of the Muslim community in their everyday (un)belonging.

Conclusion: Partition and the Inconclusive Stories

“The ghosts of Partition are here to haunt us again, and perhaps to alert us once again to the need to more closely examine the many aspects of its history” (Butalia 2017, 3).

On 14th August 2021, on the eve of the 75th Independence Day celebrations of India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that 14th August will be observed as ‘Partition Horrors Remembrance Day’ for commemorating the hardships Indians suffered during Partition.¹⁶² More than seventy years after the geographical bifurcation of the subcontinent, which has been deeply engraved in the political, social, religious and personal lives of the people in the newly created nation-states, it is for the first time that an ‘official’ attempt to remember Partition has been made. Irrespective of the politics of remembrance which often portrayed it as an ‘aberration,’ there have been frequent invoking of Partition in the discussions on the conceptions of a nation-state in India. As already discussed, the crisis of the nation-state and the rise of religious fundamentalism have been the impetus for the new directions in the Partition studies since the 1990s. It has initiated an interdisciplinary turn in Partition studies by incorporating memories and fictional writings in its analysis of the continuing repercussions of the event. However, the development of religious fundamentalism and their efforts to redefine the Indian nation-state along cultural lines have once again necessitated the need to reinterpret Partition stories and recognise their relevance in contemporary Indian society. It led to the retrieval of untold stories, reinterpretations of the old and emergence of new locations within the Partition repertoire. It has re-emphasised the interdisciplinarity of the Partition archive. The present study has been an informed attempt to analyse Partition from a hitherto unknown context in the landscape of Partition experience, thereby widening its archive to include the

¹⁶²Following the Prime Minister’s declaration, the Union Home Ministry also issued a notification endorsing 14th August 14th as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day in memory of the people who lost their lives during Partition (*The Hindu* 2021).

southern regions in the subcontinent. In doing so, the study has dealt with how the vernacular narratives of Partition are contingent upon the particular socio-political histories of the region and its inter-community engagements.

In the present study, I have explored the vernacular narratives on Partition in the context of Kerala, which is identified as a distinct socio-political unit within the Indian nation-state. In doing so, I have engaged with the ‘exceptionality’ attributed to Kerala in terms of its communitarian social fabric and how various social imaginaries embedded within the region negotiated with these histories of national consequence. The political and social premises from which these narratives develop and their interactions with the questions of nation, religious identity and postcolonial belonging have been the wider questions the study addressed. While nation becomes the anchoring point of select narratives on Partition, the region’s tryst with various socio-political movements have been considered as the essential point of reference in their analysis. In the process, the development of political secularism, at least in the public scenario and the predicament of minority communities, like Muslims, have been argued to be influencing the particular region’s experience of Partition.

An exploration of the Partition literature attempted in Chapter 1 reveals how it has become a perennial presence in the reiterations of the ‘national.’ The proponents of nationalist historiography and the rising religious fundamentalism have employed the histories of bifurcation in order to foster an idea of India which draws on the inter-religious divide between Hindus and Muslims. However, the contestations faced by the existing definitions of the ‘nation’ from various corners have also brought in Partition to highlight the faultlines in the nation-state. Thus, Partition has emerged as a site of contestation where the concepts of nation, religious identity and minority question have undergone substantial reformulations in the Indian subcontinent. These reinterpretations have substantiated the conception of Partition as a process instead of an event marking the subcontinent’s bifurcation and the violence that it

engendered. As Partition becomes a process that continues to shape the socio-political, religious and personal lives in the subcontinent, the theoretical paradigms with which we understand such processes becomes important. Thus, Partition becomes a historical process with which the larger questions of nation, communalism, and minority belonging could be explored in its physical locations and distant imaginations like Kerala.

The vernacular histories of Partition in Kerala are explored by focusing on the development of the region into a distinct socio-political region, even from its ancient imaginations to the contours of the modern linguistic state as we perceive it today. This trajectory of 'exceptionalism' apropos to the social and political processes and their impact on various communities has been traced in Chapter 2. The region's multiculturalism in terms of colonial confrontations, a multi-religious social fabric and active public politics has been briefly explored in the thesis to contextualise select narratives on Partition in the particular milieu of Kerala. Various socio-political movements that shaped Kerala have been identified to be adhering to the principle of political secularism, which is impinged on the reformist and developmental aspirations of the region. Though communities have been a prominent factor in various kinds of mobilisations, they have been anchored on the question of national-popular in Kerala, often making these assertions viable in the secular space of the nation (Mannathukkaren 2021). It has a tremendous impact on the community politics of minority communities, especially Muslims in postcolonial India, whose lives Partition drastically shaped. Thus, the way religion as a political tool has been employed in Kerala in order to achieve developmental aspirations significantly deviates from the patterns in other parts of the subcontinent, especially in its manifestations in the Partition narratives. Furthermore, it has been argued to be one of the sole reasons for establishing a unique network of inter-community relationships in Kerala. Thus, the selected narratives on Partition emerge from such regionally specific contexts, and

at the same time, they negotiate with the national question to validate the postcolonial existence of Kerala within the Indian nation-state.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the early twentieth century heralded several social and political transformations within Kerala. The socio-political movements within the region and the strengthening of the national movement across the country had a substantial impact on the region's cultural psyche. The advent of Left movements in the cultural landscape of Malayalam resulted in a literary arena that witnessed the development of the Progressive Writers' Movement. The sense of 'progress' associated with these writers has been impinged on their 'realistic' portrayals of Kerala society, occupying a predominant position in the literary modernity in Malayalam, coupled with an underlying longing for further change along progressive lines. Deviating from the social novels of the nineteenth century, the Progressive Writers Movement dealt with the hitherto unexplored realms in the region. The class struggles of the Left ideology and anti-caste resistances of the communities influenced these writers to find a place in their narrative world. With the technique of social realism, their stories weave in contemporary Kerala society, egalitarian in principle and (sub)national in content.

The third chapter delineates a *Malayalee* perception of Partition as revealed in the selected literary narratives. In the process, the Progressive Writers' Movement in Malayalam became a specific context through their (sub)nationalist vision of modern *Malayalee* society. The reading of selected stories as Partition narratives attempted a comparative analysis of the literary representation of Partition in Malayalam to that of other languages by drawing on the recurrently used themes, metaphors and narrative frameworks. Through a discussion of the political, social and religious realms embodied in the texts, the chapter invoked the history of Partition and Muslim identity to the otherwise 'secular' narratives of the regional historiography in Kerala. At a crucial juncture in the trajectory of nation-building and socio-political upheaval in Kerala, the selected narratives on Partition become the testimonies for

Partition in its vernacular contexts. However, they address the particular socio-political context in which the nation emerged in Kerala, besides the regional interferences of caste-class struggles and the linguistic unification of the state.

Literature has often democratised history by transgressing its disciplinary boundaries and popularising its interpretive possibilities. Similarly, the selected literary narratives portrayed Partition in the context of the emerging nation from a southern region. The inclusion of literary narratives in the study of Partition has been crucial, as elaborated in Chapter 3. The chapter, by engaging with the selected texts as both historical as well as literary narratives, analysed the inter-relationship between literature and history. These writers, positioned in the literary modernity of Malayalam of that time, have been instrumental in imagining the region of Kerala as envisioned in their narratives on the basis of egalitarian values. In the process, they locate Partition and its experiences outside the ‘secular’ domain of the nation. They identify and pathologise the communal fury associated with Partition as its obvious characteristic in order to visualise the upcoming nation in their socialist vision. Thus, the writers’ conception of literature is highly shaped by the nationalistic vision of the Progressive Writers Movement. Their emphasis on the vision of ‘human’ citizens neglected the impending reality of minority belonging in a post-Partition society. By raising regionally contingent concerns, different from that of its northern perceptions, these texts also contribute to the imagining of Kerala as a politically, socially and communally distinct region.

The vision of Partition as narrated in the writings of the Progressive Writers movement has disapproved of the politics that Partition represented in the emerging nation. Contesting such nationalist visions, Partition as a process has emerged in the postcolonial public sphere of the nation now and then, affecting the inter-community relations and questioning the minority belonging in the country. The formation of the Malappuram district and its demographically Muslim majority has invoked the memories of Partition and the related conceptions of a

Muslim landscape in Kerala. Chapter 4 explored the public discussions and the debates in Kerala Legislative Assembly in order to understand how the formation of Malappuram invoked the fears of minority mobilisations as the reincarnations of Partition in the region. Exploring various narratives on the formation of Malappuram, the chapter has examined how Partition unleashed new anxieties and instigated new regional imaginaries of contesting spaces challenging the secular spaces of the nation and its role in triggering a regionally specific community politics as in the case of IUML. The public discussions on the district with the Muslim majority triggered the fears of another Pakistan and the rampant anti-Muslim prejudices in the region since the Malabar Rebellion. Furthermore, the discussions in the Kerala Legislative Assembly revealed the incapability of a postcolonial nation-state to accommodate the divergent social imaginaries possible within a country like India. In the state's official language, the Malappuram district has to be defined based on developmental narrative and administrative yardsticks in order to claim legitimacy. The district's Muslim demography and its long history of anti-colonial and anti-feudal resistances invoked the imaginations of reincarnations of Partition, otherwise converted into the official language of development. Thus, the discussions on the formation of Malappuram point towards the inefficiency of the nation-state to address the postcolonial dilemma imparted by Partition in conceiving the minority question. When the 'progressiveness' expressed in the literary modernity of Malayalam during the early twentieth century (un)consciously omitted the question of Muslim belonging, it has emerged as the apparent sign of Partition in its afterlives even in its vernacular contexts.

Thus, the figure of minority is significant in the prolonged changes induced by Partition in postcolonial Indian society. Partition has engendered new identity configurations affecting the 'everyday' of the nations. The political subjectivity of 'Paradesi' as an identity constituted by Partition in the vernacular context of Kerala is explored in Chapter 5. 'Paradesi,' an Indian

origin Pakistan citizen who claims their Indian identity through cultural roots in Kerala, is a precarious subject induced by Partition. In both political and social aspects, their everyday struggle for assimilation has highlighted a new contour in the experience of Partition in its vernacular contexts. Thus, an examination of the political subjectivity of 'Paradesi' has opened up new theoretical possibilities in Partition studies by bringing in the themes of transnational migration and the refugee question. The discrimination and marginalisation experienced by 'Paradesi' also problematises the 'exceptional' communitarian feature of Kerala public sphere. It directs us to the 'pan-Indian' ways where the process of Partition has tampered the Muslim belonging beyond its geographical implications. Thus, the chapter has argued that the experiences of 'Paradesi' foreground the way Kerala adheres to the nationalist conception of Partition and the resultant identity configurations, often deviating from its communitarian trajectory.

The project has taken off by interrogating the prevalent absence of narratives from south India in the scholarly analysis of Partition. By deploying the analytical category of 'vernacular,' the study has argued that accounts of the *Malayalee* experiences of Partition are the products of local histories of religious coexistence and communal politics. In the process, the study has engaged with a *mélange* of narratives ranging from literary works, administrative documents and personal interviews. It is these multiple aspects of Partition that the study intends to emphasise. The study engages with these narratives from a regional context as the vernacular commentaries on Partition and raises important questions regarding the nation, its regional imaginings and contestations. In addition, it enables us to ponder over new directions in the minority question and the religious problematic induced by the spectre of Partition in the entire subcontinent.

Through the selected narratives on Partition in Malayalam, the study has identified the gaps left out in the existing formulations on Partition. The process also has problematised

Partition as a north India-centric event. Considering Partition as a defining moment in the narratives of nation and the histories of communalism, the study foregrounds Partition as a historical process that has continued to impart meanings in the nation's political, social and religious lives. It explains the rationale in bringing 'distant' southern regions like Kerala into the problematic of Partition. The theoretical possibilities revealed throughout the study have been grappling with questions related to nation, region, and their interactions. It has been made possible primarily through a trajectory of the region's history which is divergent from the nation's trajectory, at the same time intersecting at particular junctures. Thus, the selected narratives become the vernacular commentaries on these concepts, highlighting Partition's ramifications as a pan-Indian phenomenon that alarmingly homogenises the conceptions regarding minorities and their belonging in the postcolonial nation.

In such a scenario, new vantage points in the analysis of historical processes like Partition are significant in unravelling its contemporary manifestations. It explains its intrusion into our ordinary lives, during a cricket match or a movie discussion, instigating the fear of an 'untrustworthy' Muslim figure.¹⁶³ The non-physical landscape of Partition, like Kerala, which is distant from its geographical manifestations, will provide new insights into such discussions. These discourses unravel how the histories of national importance negotiate with the regional socio-political contexts. It will provide further possibilities in understanding the region and its (non)complementary relationship with the nation-state. Furthermore, these discourses substantiate how the conjunctures in the past are predicated on the present and its vision for the future, which provides further theoretical possibilities in understanding these processes where

¹⁶³There were severe attacks on the Muslim students in Punjab and widespread social outrage against Indian Muslims in general and the Muslim player in Indian cricket team Mohammed Shami, particularly when India lost a match in the 2021 T20 World Cup to Pakistan on 24th October 2021 (*Scroll.in* 2021).

the nation, region and community play a significant role. It can be conceived as a future extension conceivable in the purview of the present study.

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Imagining the Region: Understanding Partition as a Process in the Context of Kerala

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Abstract: Contemporary political climate in India has witnessed repeated invoking of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 in relation to the Muslim question, affirming its role in defining the religious identities and communal politics in the subcontinent. Academic studies on the partition have largely remained regionally contingent, centring on the northern part of the subcontinent where the event has struck physically. This paper attempts to explore the vernacular experiences of partition, one of the most eventful and catastrophic events in the history of the subcontinent, by considering Kerala, the southernmost state of India, as an entry point to the repertoire of Partition. For the same, the paper analyses two short stories “Gusthi” [Wrestling] written by P. Kesavadev and “Gandhijiyyude Anthyam” [The Death of Gandhi] by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pilla. The attempt is to read the stories as partition narratives in the backdrop of Kerala's socio-political ethos of those times. For the purpose, the paper attempts to read the narratives along with discussions around Kerala's community formations.

Keywords: Partition, Kerala, Nation, Hindu, Muslim.

Contemporary political climate in the country has witnessed repeated invoking of the partition¹ of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 in relation to the Muslim question affirming its role in defining the

¹ Here onwards, Partition.



religious identities and communal politics² in the subcontinent. Academic studies on the Partition have largely remained regionally contingent, centring on the northern part of the subcontinent where the event has struck physically. This paper attempts to explore the vernacular experiences of Partition, one of the most eventful and catastrophic events in the history of the subcontinent, by considering Kerala, the southernmost state of India, as an entry point to the repertoire of Partition. For the same, the paper analyses two short stories “Gusthi” [Wrestling] written by P. Kesavadev and “Gandhijiude Anthyam” [The Death of Gandhi] by Thakazhi Sivashankara Pilla.³

By engaging with the discourse of Partition in the context of Kerala, where the “dissident genealogy” of Kerala modernity offers “extraordinary claims of “exceptionalism” in relation to its communitarian consciousness,⁴ I interrogate the common ‘prejudice’ in the scholarly analysis of Partition that this momentous event did not significantly affect South India. Through a deployment of the analytical category of ‘vernacular’ in the understanding of Partition, this paper makes a departure from the north Indian-centric narratives and explores how Partition was felt and experienced in South India, especially in Kerala. Accounts of vernacular experiences of Partition, I argue, can be gleaned from local histories of religious coexistence and communal politics.

Among the southern regions of India, Kerala has always been identified as a distinctive political and socio- cultural entity. It has been a meeting ground for almost all the major religions in India; an outcome, often on account of the trade routes rather than that of conquests. If the land had a foretaste of the colonial experience with the Portuguese-Dutch during the 15th century, Kerala has also witnessed the first Marxist government coming to power through the ballot in the 20th century. Such rich history has contributed in creating a unique ‘Malayali’ identity, native as well as a migrant. The state as well as the society, with its towering claims of ‘exceptionalism’ has always been a constant focus of academic enquiry for its discreet communitarian consciousness and it validates an enquiry into the Malayalam narratives of Partition. The paper also traces the discourse

² In my usage, the term communal politics ascribes to the politics that revolves around religious and communitarian identities. In Indian context, it, often, assumes the political lenience observed in any particular religious community, adhering to their religious identities. In Kerala, the term acquires a greater significance in the context of the activities of Indian Union Muslim League and Kerala Congress.

³ Pioneers of Progressive Writers’ Movement in Malayalam literature. (Here onwards Kesavadev and Thakazhi)

⁴ In his introduction titled “Hybrid Assemblages: Modernity and Exceptionalism in Kerala” to the VIII:18 issue of *Tapasam*, a quarterly journal for Kerala studies in Malayalam, V. J. Varghese brings together the articles that touch upon varied instances of Kerala Modernity and exceptionalism.



of 'exceptionalism' around Kerala vis-a-vis other parts of the country which claims an enlightened communal consciousness for the region. Such an enquiry is accomplished by analysing the narratives around the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947. An engagement with how Partition has been represented in Malayalam literature would, hence, help us widen our understanding of Partition as well as enable us to critically engage with the questions of nationalism and Hindu-Muslim relationships.

The first part of the paper analyses Partition as a historical process and the ways in which it has continued to affect the social life of the subcontinent. In the light of these observations, the second part reads the short stories as Partition narratives in Malayalam. The later section of the paper looks at the literary scenario of Malayalam in order to contextualize these narratives on Partition and discusses the role of literature in offering a vision of a modern Kerala. It discusses how the literature of the period captured the spirit of these mobilisations. Here, the paper discusses the identities which got contextualised in the literary narratives of the period and also how these narratives mirrored the social and political ripples of the period. In the backdrop of the stories, the final section attempts to understand the mobilising factors behind communities in Kerala and also the ways in which community identities were incorporated into the social movements in Kerala. While discussing the later studies which analysed these movements, the paper looks at the ways in which these movements tried to exempt the instances of communal fervour projecting Kerala as an example of exceptional communal consciousness. This part underlines the important reasons behind the development of this exceptional communitarianism in the context of Kerala.

I- UNDERSTANDING PARTITION AS A PROCESS

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 into the nation-states of India and Pakistan has continued to be a spectral presence creating different meanings in the lives of the people at different historical junctures. Making sense of Partition and its impact has been an arduous task as it has continued to impart varied meanings to the everyday life of the subcontinent. Historians have always been keen on exploring the manifold meanings Partition continues to make in the lives of the subcontinent. For instance, the works of Urvashi Butalia, Gyanendra Pandey, and Ayesha Jalal,



et al mark significant interventions in the study of Partition and are helpful in explaining how mass violence and dislocation brought into being not only the new nations of India and Pakistan, but also re-defined the “Muslim” and “Hindu” citizens who lived within their borders.⁵ These narratives around the event of Partition have North-Western India and Eastern India as their locus of enquiry as these regions were partitioned physically and witnessed the unprecedented violence it unleashed. However, Partition as a historical process that continues to affect the entire subcontinent explains the rationale in bringing other regions like Kerala into the story of Partition.

Remembering Partition has always remained a way of looking into that time in the past when the promises of nationhood and freedom were met with unprecedented violence and it is remembered as the cataclysmic moment of communal strife in the country. The stigma of communalism has always been remained with Partition. Descriptions of all communal strife hark back to Partition. Most often the narratives around Partition are generalized into the tales of communalism. Such histories fail to incorporate the complexities and subtleties of institutional and structural changes introduced by the colonial government and also the impact of socio-economic processes on caste, class and religion-based alignments. Partition was invoked during the times of anti- Sikh riots of 1984 and also during the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 when religious identity was in serious question. Thus the significance of Partition lies not in its stature as an event that happened in 1947, but as a process that continues to influence the political, social and religious scenario of the subcontinent.

The radicalization of history encourages the need to diverge from the conventional theorizations which failed to free itself from the problematic of communalism. The debate around Partition was extended during the last two decades or so through the exploration of the regional and class dimensions of the so called ‘Muslim’ communal problem. The idea of a ‘separatist- Muslim’ has always remained a common reference point for rewriting the 'histories' of an event that casts its

⁵Pandey, Gyanendra. 2001. *Remembering Partition: Violence Nationalism and History in India*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press; Butalia, Urvashi. 2000. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. North Carolina: Duke University Press; Butalia, Urvashi. Ed. *Partition: The Long Shadow*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2015. Jalal. Ayesha. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.



shadow over many aspects of state and society in the subcontinent. But most of the theorizations seem to be in a self chosen amnesia where it forces itself to forget the fact that there were powerful secular strains within Muslim Politics. Most of the early studies, it seems that, in a state centered drive to homogenize, consider Muslim as a unified, homogenous category in regardless of its regional, linguistic, cultural and class variations. They have been critiqued for their failure to unpack the notion of an all India Muslim communalism to create analytical space for the conflicting regional strands within Muslim politics. In fact, the intensity of emotions involved had more to do with the political and economic anxieties of various social classes than with a profound urge to create a Muslim/Islamic state. Most of these approaches seem reluctant in analyzing how different forms of identities and consciousness translated into a powerful campaign for a separate Muslim homeland.

However, most of these narratives were regionally contingent focusing mainly on the North Western frontier and occasionally touching upon the north eastern regions like Bengal. Considering Partition as a defining moment in the narratives of nation and the histories of communalism, it is important to foreground the stature of Partition as a historical process which has continued to impart meanings in the political, social and religious lives of the nation. It would also explain the rationale in bringing southern regions like Kerala into the narratives of Partition. Mushirul Hasan talks about a neglected reality of perceiving Partition as that point in the history when many were pushed into taking religious/Islamic positions. Kerala being an important locus in the history of Islam in the subcontinent becomes an important historical context to look at Partition and how different identities are reconstituted during this historical process.

II – READING “Gusthi” and “Gandhijiyude Anthyam” as PARTITION NARRATIVES

It is from these propositions that the paper attempts to read the selected Partition narratives in Malayalam- two short stories, “Gusthi” (Wrestling) by P. Kesavadev published in 1962 and Thakazhi Sivashankara Pillai’s “Gandhijiyude Anthyam” (The Death of Gandhi). The story, “Gusthi” by P. Kesavadev dramatizes a wrestling match in a small town in Kerala where the religious identities of the wrestlers cause a pointless discord between Hindus and Muslims at a



village teashop. The story presents the growing religious intolerance in the society in the aftermath of Partition. It presents the moment of Partition as a moment of 'madness' or irrationality. The story also seems to be unaware of any historical and social reason behind the 'sudden' outbreak of violence.

Thakazhi's story, "Gandhijiyude Anthyam" throws light on the lives of the survivors of Partition riots. They are set on a journey from West Punjab that has become the part of Pakistan, in search of a peaceful and prosperous life that has been promised by the new nation. The story uses Gandhi as the symbol of the promise of love, tolerance and communal harmony that the new nations failed to keep. The story conveys the paradox in the blood bath and poverty that accompanied the Independence. It presents Gandhi as a human God employed by the national elites in order to manipulate the masses. The story ends with the assassination of Gandhi that metaphorically suggests the beginning of a new era which is marked by the death of the ideals which were attributed to the promised nation.

The stories employ common terms, metaphors and images of violence, trauma, disaster, dislocation, homelessness and disillusionment associated with Partition. These tools have been used to describe Partition in an attempt to give this major event the manifold meanings it has in the lives of the characters. None of the texts has considered Partition as a 'political necessity.' On the other hand, Partition has been perceived as a 'distant political event.' The stories also signify the inability of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' to overcome the stereotypes of each other. The characters' involvement with historical and political realities of their times are not because of their direct participation in it but due to the repercussions of those events in the lives of ordinary people. The backdrop of the story of Thakazhi as Punjab reasserts the North-centric perception about Partition. It can be considered as a conscious attempt to disown Partition as an experience for Kerala. However, it is imagined and experienced as an unavoidable reality of being a nation, being India.

In both the narratives, nation becomes the dominant imagery. It is imagined as a better tomorrow where the values of freedom and equality are achieved. The stories portray the experiences of Partition as a moment of aberration to such imaginings of nation and warn us of the ferociousness and madness which communal identities are capable of. However, the narratives also express a deep



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nostalgia for one's own region and local belonging. May be, nation, in its vernacular imaginings, has to be identified along with a sense of identification with sub national identities. Kerala has always been considered successful in celebrating its sub national identity of being 'Malayali' along with its deep sense of being nation. It has always tried to be vocal and proud of its regional nationalism negotiating its importance along with the sense of being India.

The two writers, Kesavadev and Thakazhi hail from the tradition of progressive literary movement in Malayalam literature which is known for its portrayal of the socio- political scenario of Kerala. Their powerful stories disclose the socio-political and economic decadence of their contemporary society. In their socialist perception of the nation, individual becomes the basic unit of the nation. The imagining of the nation happens at individual level transgressing religious, caste and community barriers. Thus, they often express their discernment over the conflicts over religion and caste differences. The stories often recall a nostalgic past of religious coexistence along with hopes for an egalitarian nation.

Humanism which is seen as a central trope in Socialist writings is presented as the only code of resistance during such times as that of Partition. The authors seem to be sharing the belief that it is the value of humanism that is neglected during such violent times. And also, that, it is the humanistic way of looking at life that differentiates our times from that of our ancestors. The nostalgic past that they often contemplate is characterized by this principle of humanism. Kesavadev, being a writer who was concerned with the questions of class- caste politics, emphasizes the idea of 'humanism' as a vital part of imagining a nation.⁶ However, it can also be considered as an uncritical humanism that concentrates only on the pain and sorrow of the human suffering limiting our understanding of the political and civic fault-lines that are inherent in the nation project. Thus, human becomes instrumental in the imaginings of nation rather than other community markers like religion or caste. This way of Imagining nation by questioning the existing social hierarchies and its inequalities have been part of the literary culture in Malayalam of that

⁶ Humanism becomes a way of imagining the nation in the writings of Progressive Writers. For instance, in the writings of Basheer, Lalithambika Antharjanam, two of the prominent Progressive Writers in Malayalam, the category called human figures as an entity that is perceived above all political, social entities.



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period.

III- Literature Mirroring the Society

The late 1930s witnessed tremendous changes both in the political and cultural spheres of Kerala. The political, social, cultural and religious transformations had a severe impact on the ways in which communities in general and individuals in particular perceived themselves and also 'others.' There developed a political and social sensitivity of a rare quality amidst all these political unrest and it had a tremendous impact on the creative faculty of the times. In this period, various anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, nationalist and democratic movements strengthened in an unprecedented fashion all over Kerala. Modern value concepts which were confined to the upper strata of the society in the early phase began to spread to the lower layers of the society.⁷ In addition to the middle class, various other sections consciously entered into the mainstream of public life. Consequently political and cultural spheres became more popular and it acquired a democratic character. Such socio-political factors impacted the literary scenario as well.

As Marxist ideologies had a sway over the cultural climate of the period, literature also carried impressions of the Leftist thoughts. Marxist conception of literature is characterized by the emphasis on the ideological content in a work of art as well as its direct and indirect implications about the values established in the society. The Progressive Writers Movement in Kerala can be considered as the offshoot of the Marxist conceptualization of literature as a revolutionary tool. The formation of various organizations like *Jeevalsahitya Prasthanam*⁸ and *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam*⁹ are evidences of such trends.

Social Realism in Kerala was highly informed by its Leftist ideology. It marked the beginning of a literary tradition where the prevailing economic conditions were often problematized for further

⁷ With the advent of colonial modernity, a new set of value systems defined by principles of Universalism, Individualism, Rationalism, and so on gained a wider popularity.

⁸ *Jeevalsahitya* literally means 'living literature' or 'literature of life.' This group sided with the Art for Life's Sake, against Art for Art's Sake view, and was an endeavour influenced by Marxist-Communists who stood firmly with the peasant-working class organizations to develop a new literary form.

⁹ Progressive Literary Movement, another Left initiative in Malayalam literature inspired by the Progressive literary Movement at the national level.



speculation. Proletarian literary movements have influenced the theory of social realism in significant ways. According to K.M. George, “there was a proletarian emphasis in the new fiction; the common man became the new hero” (104).¹⁰ *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter) written by Kesavadev in 1942, *Thotti* (Scavenger) by Nagavalli R.S. Kurup in 1943, *Thottiyude Makan* (The Son of a Scavenger) and *Thendi Vargam* (The Beggar Clan) by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai in 1947 and 1950, respectively, can be cited as examples of the trend (George, 105). Social Realism¹¹ in Malayalam literature is considered to have its beginnings in *Jeevalsahitya Prasthanam* (1936) which was followed by the *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam* (1944). It can also be assumed that the Progressive Writers Movement and social-realist trends in Malayalam literature developed simultaneously. The new literary awareness helped in popularising the social movements heralding resistance and revolt against the injustices prevalent in a social system rampant with prejudices based on caste, class, community and religion. Moreover, many progressive literatures engaged themselves with issues like poverty created by the World Wars, economic crisis, landlord-capitalist exploitation, socio-religious injustice and so on. Whole sections of hitherto silenced people – landless peasants, fisherman, untouchables, the rural poor, impoverished craftsmen, men and women forced into begging and prostitution and urban workers – found voice through these writers in the form of poetry, plays, short stories, fiction and even literary criticism, probably for the first time since the age of folklore.

The discourse around Partition and the discourse of communalism in India have been read together even in contemporary times as Partition is invoked during every moment of communal strife in the country. However, the selected texts present people’s bafflement at the sudden polarization of religious identities. Partition is seen as an instance where the tradition of living with the differences is disturbed. As Ashutosh Varshney has argued, the collapse of inter- communal civic networks becomes a triggering factor for the outbreak of violence. For instance, in the story, “Gusthi” the discord at the village teashop initiates the violence. More often, communalism is seen

¹⁰ Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Malayalam are mine.

¹¹ Social realism refers to an artistic movement that is expressed in visual and other realist arts and later extended to literature also. It depicts the social and racial injustice through the portrayals of life’s struggles. This movement involves the attempt to convey a message of political and social protest that is edged with satire.



as a colonial construction which is further employed by the native elites in order to achieve selfish motives. Thakazhi's story also conceives communal tension as a phenomenon which has its roots in colonialism and nurtured further by the national elites. By drawing on Didur's argument that conceives literature as interesting commentaries on historical events, the select narratives become the 'Malayali' understanding on Partition. Though, from a 'different' (South, non Malabari) subject positions, the narratives open up the possibilities of vernacular understandings of Partition. It questions the north- centric perception about Partition and opens up the possibilities for considering Partition as a pan- Indian event.

IV- Communities and Kerala Model of Exception

The communities in Kerala and their politics have been developed out of multiple concerns. The national and social movements shaped by the immediate concerns of the region have imparted a different communitarian consciousness to the Kerala society. When the nationalist politics in the North foretold the religious narratives around the binary of Hindu/Muslim, in Kerala, it assumed the nature of caste-class politics. And it has been argued as one of the sole reasons behind the establishment of a unique network of inter- communal relationships in Kerala.¹² The narratives also suggest how the Kerala society has always managed to negate conflicts over community disparities as madness and something which is not known to Kerala. Communities served as the major mobilisational factor in shaping the politics of the region through movements for rights, recognition and reforms. Caste-community organisations served as the principle agents for political mobilisations. From nationalist movements to Communist movements, communities have served a major role in carrying the movements forward. With the advent of modernity, communities got constituted in Kerala for various reasons ranging from social reforms to political stability. Colonial modernity, with its pros and cons, paved the way for assertive mobilizations both against British

¹² See the argument of Ashutosh Varshney in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* and as well as "To Survive or to Flourish? Minority Rights and Syrian Christian Community Assertion in 20th Century Travancore/Kerala" by I. Devika and V. J. Varghese.



and local feudal lords and it necessitated an idea of collective and identification among its members. Thus, the communitarian consciousness in Kerala is often highlighted for its strife against social hierarchies and inequalities.

Social reform movements initiated by colonial modernity, missionary education and community leadership also paved the way for the reconstituting of communities during the later part of the Nineteenth Century and also to be continued in the 20th Century. “The social reform movements organized by caste and religious organizations used ascriptive identities for mobilization against the evils generated by the ideas and values of pre modern social structure. The common ground between them was their commitment to a more progressive Kerala society through modernization” (Biju, 213). Thus, the period was marked for the emergence of a communitarian consciousness that was defined in terms of class-caste politics. Malayali Memorial¹³ and Ezhava Memorial¹⁴ are two important testimonies of the developing communitarian consciousness which have its base in caste identity rather than religious identity (Ommen, 546). The movements against untouchability and other social evils conducted as part of the nationalist struggle contributed much to the awakening of depressed classes and also in bringing a social change in Kerala. Thus, the people were forced into the course of the struggle along with the agitations at a national level. However, their inclination towards the movement was motivated by their immediate concerns of caste- class oppressions along with colonial domination.

Communist Movement in Kerala has a great impact on Kerala psyche since its inception in 1930s. The movement had an indigenous quality of its own. The movement initiated a proletarian fervour which had immanent impact on the political, social and cultural realms of the society by mobilizing the less privileged sections of the society. Through systematic ideological propaganda, the Communist Movement made crucial interventions in peasant-working class issues. They gave a

¹³ Malayali Memorial is a memorandum submitted by people of Kerala to Maharaja Sree Moolam Thirunal in 1891. Signed by more than 10,000 people who include Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, Malayali Memorial agitation requested Sri Moolam Thirunal to secure jobs for the educated Keralaite citizens in the Travancore civil service. During the time majority of the jobs were in the hands of Tamil Brahmins.

¹⁴ Ezhava Memorial is a mass memorandum signed by Hindu Ezhava community in 1896. Ezhava Memorial, similar to Malayali Memorial, is a mass petition submitted by Ezhava caste to the Government of Kerala to allow the educated community people to enter government service jobs.



revolutionary vigour to the working class movements and politicized the peasants and workers. The movement had a considerable role in triggering the anti-feudal agitations of the period. Though, the face of the movement has been its class politics, communism in Kerala played a significant role in competitive bargaining for the communities vis-à-vis the state (Biju, 212). Even within the secular ideology of their class struggle, they successfully incorporated agrarian struggles, social reform movements which have an essential caste character in the context of Kerala. There by strengthening the fight against caste, the left politics in Kerala also managed to accommodate 'communal' mobilisations.

Under the leadership of Communist party, the Aikya Kerala movement¹⁵ [the movement for united Kerala] with a thrust on the linguistic identity of the region not only gained momentum but also achieved its desired end. Thus, Communism played a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of the idea of 'national popular' and cultural politics which enabled Kerala to emerge as a distinctive region within the modern India. This sub national identity has been always celebrated in Kerala, often on par with the national identity dominating all other local identities of caste, class and religion. Thus, simultaneous to various political mobilizations in Kerala based on caste, class, etc., the call for a linguistic identity also emerged.

Academic intelligentsia has always been careful not to misrecognise Kerala's community politics as religious nationalism or communalism.¹⁶ J. Devika and V.J Varghese, in their analysis of the Syrian community assertions in Kerala, argue that communalism in Kerala society refers not to animosity among communities, but to intense competition around rights and resources within the field of modern politics. The article also explores how the communities in Kerala have been diligent in separating religiosity from their politics by taking instances from Syrian Christians (37). The select narratives also present imagine a nation where religious coexistence is celebrated

¹⁵ The movement initiated for the unification of Kerala in 1940s consisting of Malabar and the princely states of Travancore and Kochi.

¹⁶ For instance, *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala* (1989) by George Mathew; "Communities at the Polls: Electoral Politics" by James Chiriyankandath (1993); and the Mobilisation of Communal Groups in Travancore" in *Politics, women and Wellbeing: How Kerala became a Model?* (2003) by Robin Jeffrey.



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reverberating Kerala's communitarian politics which is often identified as the secular strains within the region.

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