

**Exploring sovereignty and charisma: engagements, contestations and fabulations from the Global South**

**16, 17, 18 December 2019**

**Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (India)**

In recent years much research has focused on ways through which religion has engendered intolerance and even violence, unsettling the tenets and institutions of secular modernity. Whilst a growing body of scholarship has begun critically to explore how theologies and religious practice have contributed to the constitution and reproduction of the modern itself—ontologically as much as practically—the focus has been primarily, and in somewhat anachronistic fashion, on the historical unfolding of Judaeo-Christian theological traditions. To boot, the concepts and analytics routinely mobilized to explore relations between religion and modernity draw (perhaps inevitably) on intellectual and discursive traditions deeply embedded within the same ontologies they seek to account for, namely those emerging—and spreading through colonialism and conquest—from western European and north American contexts. Redressing the shortcomings of such an apparent ethnocentric analytical circularity requires the mobilization of different intellectual traditions and diverse historical experiences through which apparently familiar categories such as, for instance, “religion”, “secularism” or “modernity” are constituted, debated and contested. We suggest that the historical experience of the south Indian state of Kerala can contribute to a much-needed re-focusing of existing scholarship and debates. Not only does it underscore the complex articulation of religiosity and religious practice within and between different religious communities and traditions, but it also provides an entry point to explore and theorize foundational relations between “religion” and the modern in the context of religious heterogeneity, colonialism and global capitalism.

Kerala is often represented as a unique instance of a relatively peaceful coexistence of multiple religious traditions over several centuries, and of their articulation with secular modernity. Indeed, the peculiarities of modern Kerala have been attributed simultaneously to an underlying historical culture of tolerance, which allowed both for the development of a shared religiosity and for the integration of different religious communities within existing polities; and to the consolidation of secular and progressive politics in the state that have foreclosed the emergence of organized communalism and religious intolerance. Recent critical studies have interrupted such a dominant and celebratory popular rhetoric, delineating instead the contours of a history in which relationships between different religious traditions were constituted simultaneously on mutual intelligibility and reciprocal borrowing, as well as on intense competition and antagonism. At the same time, emerging scholarship has explored ways through which these religious traditions and the religiosities they engendered, fostered modalities of moral reasoning, technologies of public debate, and forms of political representation and social action that significantly shaped contemporary Kerala modernity.

It is clearly the case, then, that Kerala’s history and contemporary configurations of relationships between different religious communities/traditions has an import for scholarly debates beyond India and South Asia as a whole. Firstly, Kerala’s religious heterogeneity suggests that theologies and religious practices are not simply constituted or experienced through differences and contestations within specific religious traditions, but also as the outcome of engagements and encounters with Others, whether religious, ethnic, secular or political, both locally and globally. This complex and non-linear history unsettles all too common attempts to reduce (historical or contemporary) religiosity either to bounded theologies and traditions, or to demotic syncretism. Secondly, Kerala provides the empirical and conceptual ground to explore the processes through which multiple and inchoate religiosities might acquire coherence and substance in different historical circumstances as quasi-hegemonic “traditions”; at the same time, it draws us to consider the orientations and practices of those who imagine their ethical lives alongside or outside the confines of religious orthodoxy. Thirdly, the heterogeneity of religiosity and religious practice in Kerala, as well as the complex historical relationships between religious and political communities in the state, bring to the fore questions concerning the articulation of different notions of sovereignty, legitimacy, and charisma, and how these are constituted or practised within and across different social and material terrains. Fourthly, Kerala’s historical and contemporary experiences underscore ways through which religious discourse and practice en-gender the everyday in multiple and often divergent ways. Finally, paying attention to the “banalization” of religion in public and private life in colonial and post-colonial Kerala invites us to develop novel, empirically-grounded analytics to theorize the constitution and working of modern secularity/secularism beyond the constraints of European or North American intellectual archives and histories.

This workshop, then, has a wide and open-ended agenda that aims to interrogate the historical as well as contemporary dynamics that have constituted a unique Malayali modernity by analysing the complex articulation of theological, political and economic transformations within different religious traditions, and the ways they might work towards constituting contingent communities and (counter)publics. It seeks to draw out instances of mutual borrowing, as well as contestations and dissent between these traditions and so-called secular modernity. The workshop intends to problematize how these interactions and the resultant discursive as well as structural transformations in Kerala society produced specific manifestations in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts. Moreover, it aims to understand the current globalized, late capitalist moment where these religious traditions and religiosities are embedded in and simultaneously shape economic, political as well as social practices.

The workshop is jointly organized by J. Devika (CDS), VJ Varghese (HCU), R Santhosh (IIT Madras), V. Napolitano (Uni of Toronto), Simon Coleman (Uni of Toronto) and F Osella (Sussex Uni). It is supported by a generous grant from the Connaught Global Challenge Initiative (University of Toronto), as well as from contributions from CDS, HCU, IIT Madras and Sussex University.

**WORKSHOP PROGRAMME**

**16 December**

**09.00-09.30: registration**

**09.30-10.00: welcome address** by Prof Sunil Mani, CDS Director and Prof J. Devika

Tea/coffee served to participants

**10.00-10.30: introduction:** R Santhosh and F Osella

**10.30-12.00:**

**Wilson Chacko Jacob,** Department of History, Concordia University

*Mampuram Maqam: Between God’s Sovereignty and the Colonial State*

**Priya Chandran**, Government College, Ambalappuzha, Kerala

*The Divine Mother, Spiritual Master and Hugging Saint: The Three Representative Images of Mata Amritanandamayi*

**Discussant: VJ Varghese**, Hyderabad Central University

**12.00-13.30:**

**Bivitha Easo**, Hyderabad Central University

*Translated Christianities: ‘Eastern’ Christian Con-texts*

**Ashraf Kunnummal**, University of Johannesburg

*Religious Difference in the Colonial World: A View from the Malabar*

**Discussant: Filippo Osella**, Sussex University

13.30-15.00: lunch

**15.30-17.00:**

**Abdur Rahoof Ottathingal**, Leiden University

*Re-citing Sufism in Kerala: Islamic vernacularism and ethical trans-formations of a community*

**Ambili Anna Markose**, Hyderabad Central University

*Memory, Material, and Historiography: Formulations and Political Discourses of Christianity in Kerala*

**Discussant: Sanal Mohan**, Kerala Council for Historical Research

Tea/coffee served to participants

**17.00-18.30:**

**roundtable discussion** on *Decolonizing sovereignty and charisma: perspectives on the study of religiosity/religious practice from the Global South*

**with Simon Coleman (University of Toronto), Yasser Arafath (UoD), Wilson Chacko Jacob (Concordia Uni.) and T T Sreekumar (EFLU); Chair F. Osella**

19.00: dinner at CDS for paper-givers, discussants and guests

**17 December**

**10.00-11.30:**

**Muhammed Niyas Ashraf**, Freie Universität Berlin

*Saintly/Sufi Piety in Mālā Literature: Muslim Liturgical Sphere and Cult of Sufi Saints in the Nineteenth Century Malabar*

**Syed Mohammed Faisal**, International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore

*Vasco Da Gama’s Gift(s): Anthropology of a colonial moment*

**Discussant: Yasser Arafath**, University of Delhi

Tea/coffee served to participants

**11.30-13.00:**

**Nandagopal Menon**, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

*Who is a Wali? Theological Polemics, Kinship and Social Imaginaries*

**Visakh M S**, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

*Configuring Religious Authority: Embodied Knowledge, Neoliberal Developmentalism and the Place of Ulama in Sunni Muslim Self- Fashioning, Kerala, South India*

**Discussant: Ajay Sekhar**, SSUS Kalady

13.00-15.00 : lunch

**15.00-16.30:**

**Anish. V. R.,** S.A.R.B.T.M Govt. College, Koylandi

*Myths, religious beliefs and formation of a caste: Intersection of Subalternity and belief within Pulayas, a case study from South Kerala*

**Abhilash Malayil**, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

*Mī(n)māṃsa: Fish-Meat, Naṃbūtiri Ritual and the Early Modern Political Conflict in Cāttirāṅkaṃ*

**Discussant: J. Devika**, Centre for Development Studies

Tea/coffee served to participants

**16.30-18.00:**

**roundtable discussion** on *Religiosity between emancipation and subjection: caste, gender and the reproduction of multiple marginalities*

**with Valentina Napolitano (University of Toronto), Bindu Menon (UoD), Sanal Mohan (KCHR), J. Devika (CDS); Chair VJ Varghese**

19.00: buffet dinner for paper-givers, discussants and guests

**18 December**

**10.00-11.30:**

**Levin Mary Jacob**, Hyderabad Central University

*Women’s Mission for Women: Translating Protestantism, Values, and Domesticity for the Syrian Christian Women in nineteenth century Central Travancore, Kerala*

**Sonja Maria Thomas**, Colby College & **Carmel Christy Kattithara Joseph**, Kamala Nehru College

*Indriappam and Vindaloo: Caste and Food Culture among Kerala “Christians”*

**Discussant: Bindu Menon**, University of Delhi

Tea/coffee served to participants

**11.30-13.00:**

**Roopesh O.B.,** Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai

*Producing the Hindu temple: didactics, changing priesthood, and public performance*

**R. Harikrishnan**, Jawaharlal Nehru University

*Immanence and Transcendence Instituting Regional Constituencies: A Study of Temples in Oṇāṭṭukara*

**Discussant: T M Yesudasan**, C.M.S. College

13.00-15.00 : lunch

**15.00-16.30:**

**Salah Punathil**, Hyderabad Central University

*Violence among Religious Communities in Kerala: Beyond the Binary of ‘Secular’ and ‘Communal’*

**Nirmala V.U.,** Jawaharlal Nehru University

*In Search of Silver Lining: The Communist Discourse on Social Harmony, Dissent and Heterodoxy in Religion*

**Discussant: T.T. Sreekumar**, English and Foreign Languages University

Tea/coffee served to participants

**16.30-18.00:**

**roundtable discussion** on *Everyday politics of religious pluralism in a “secular state”: Interrogating the Kerala Experience*

**with Benjamin Soares (University of Florida), Ajay S Sekher (SUSS), Nandagopal Menon (University of Göttingen), T M Yesudasan (C.M.S. College): Chair R. Santhosh**

**18.00: end**

**ABSTRACTS**

**1-Wilson Chacko Jacob, Concordia University**

**wilson.jacob@concordia.ca**

**Mampuram Maqam: Between God’s Sovereignty and the Colonial State**

What does it take for an alien tradition of representing power to take root in a new soil? What are the terms of everyday politics that must be negotiated and/or overcome? By tracing the history and memory of the Mampuram Maqam in northern Kerala, this paper draws on my recently published monograph, For God or Empire: Sayyid Fadl and the Indian Ocean World, to think more deeply about these questions. The book did not dwell on Kerala as much as I would have liked since its main focus was the career of the son of Sayyid Alawi, the saint of the maqam.  The former spent the bulk of his life in exile in the Middle East. Bringing together various threads from the book and elsewhere, my paper will elaborate how modalities of sovereignty were undergoing transformation in the encounter between Sayyid Alawi and the East India Company from the late-eighteenth century until his death in 1844. I will also reflect on what the maqam, memory, and hagiographic inscriptions of his life might tell us about the ostensible resolution to the problem of sovereignty.

**2-Priya Chandran, Guest Lecturer, Govt. College, Ambalapuzha**

**priya.sandi@gmail.com**

**The Divine Mother, Spiritual Master and Hugging Saint: The Three Representative Images of Mata Amritanandamayi**

In my paper I will discuss the three images of Mata Amritanandamayi-the divine mother, spiritual master and mother icon. I argue that these three images are constituted in three different stages in the development of Mata Amritanandamayi faith formation-the divine stage, the charismatic stage and the iconic stage respectively. The first image, the “divine mother” refers to an extraordinary quality of Mata Amritanandamayi as a woman who projects a motherly attitude towards all people. The second one, the “spiritual master” signifies a charismatic leader who is assumed to have an enlightened view of the sensible world in which she is part, someone who is capable of envisioning its working schema and hence able to ‘foresee’ an individual’s working path or destiny within it. The third image is the “hugging saint”, which would sound strange to the uninitiated as it does not reflect any pre-existing mythological category and in this sense stands out from the other two images. I do not claim that these three images exhaust the different significations of the Mata and here I am also aware that Mata faith is a dynamic phenomenon. What I wish to do in this paper is to understand the three representative images of the Mata from a certain point in the course of development of the Mata faith. I am looking at these images with the help of a poster announcing one of Mata Amritanandamayi’s visits to Hyderabad, India. Apart from this poster I use stories, newspaper and magazine articles, testimonials, images, videos and biographical accounts to examine the construction of images that Mata Amritanandamayi represents.

**3-Bivitha Easo, Hyderabad Central University**

**bivi.easo@gmail.com**

**Translated Christianities: ‘Eastern’ Christian Con-texts**

Following Jean-Luc Nancy’s call to reflect on what is so self-evident about Christianity that obstructs us from examining it more closely (2008), this paper is a two-tier attempt to engage with the ‘non-western’ genealogies of Christianity. On the one hand, I endeavor to delineate an ‘eastern’ Christian intellectual tradition by reading select ‘non-western’ scholars like Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1934), Christos Yannaras (1935-present) and Paulose Gregorios (1922-1996) to problematize the imperial project of ‘western-Christian West’ that integrated multiple Christianities and their heterogeneous world views to witness the emergence of a secular modern nation-state. In Bulgakov we find a critique on the homogeneity of the logic of capital and argument for heterogeneous communitarian world views that bind political economy; Yannaras works out a systematic critique of democracy, secularism and modernity, which is rooted in the emergence of the ‘west’ as well as a ‘western’ Christianity. And Gregorios is read to argue that the ‘west,’ by placing Augustine at the beginning of Christian theological-philosophical vector and erasing the traces of divergent debates before him, “pseudomorphosized” Christianity and laid the foundation for ‘western’ civilizational enterprise that privileged individual over community, secular over sacred and scientific rationality over experiential categories. Thereafter, I locate select texts and their contexts from Kerala, mostly from the repertoire of what is today known as Syrian Christian community, in the above framework. By reading *The* *Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper* (1599) along with a sixteenth century Islamic text called *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* (1583), and *Varthamanappusthakam* (1785) in comparative contexts, I engage with ‘vernacular’ ‘minor’ communities constantly in contestation with what Derrida called “Globalatinization” (2002). Further, I critically situate contemporary projects like SRITE, which collects, translates and digitizes Syrian and Garshuni-Malayalam manuscripts from early modern period, as a desire for lost Christian communitarian genealogies in the region that contest and complicate the teleological historiography of Christianity. The paper, in short, will be an attempt to engage with translations of Christian traditions from a ‘non-western’ context to understand Christianity in translation. Through a back-and-forth reading of these texts, contexts and its translations, I will be arguing that south Indian Christianity presents a case for trans-regional experiences of a ‘minor’ Christian community with vernacular-cosmopolitan manifestations.

**4-Ashraf Kunnummal,**  **Research Fellow, Department of Religion Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa**

ashrafk497@gmail.com

Religious Difference in the Colonial World: A View from the Malabar

Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama reached the shores of the Malabar Coast in 1498, meeting the ruler, or “Zamorin,” of Calicut in a tense exchange. The famed Malabari Muslim scholar Zainuddin Makhdoom bore witness to the arrival of the Portuguese and their expansion. In his poem *Tahrid Ahl al-Iman ‘ala Jihad ‘Abadah al-Sulban* (Instigation of the Believers to Struggle Against the Cross-worshippers), Makhdoom explicitly described the Portuguese as *Ahl al-Sulb* (People of the Cross) placing them within the taxonomy of militaristic crusaders. There were key internal logics and units of analyses that Malabar Muslim chroniclers used to differentiate the European Other from their indigenous neighbors that are characteristic of a wider trend I will expand upon in this presentation. As Nabil Matar argues, from the Middle Ages to at least the early modern period, Muslim litterateurs distinguished between *Ahl al-Sulb* (People of the Cross) and *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book). The former salibiyyun (lit. cross worshippers) were explicitly associated with their “military danger, crusading ideology and imperial ambitions” while the latter were people from other faiths in Islamicate worlds with whom Muslim communities maintained normative peace and relatively prosperous positive relation.

The differentiation between what Malabar Muslim chroniclers perceived as a foreign militaristic Christian invader and an indigenous Christian neighbor points to a sophisticated unit of analysis not based in an “irrational” religious logic – as the dictates of secularism would assume – but to a theologico- political distinction. This means that the use of theological language to identify the Other is not irrational or simply about religious “truth and falsehood”, as Latin American decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres might say. As decolonial scholars have done extensive work on the archive of the Atlantic world in relation to modernity/coloniality, their research has not fully unearthed the histories and experience of colonialism and religion in other geographies. This presentation argues that this indigenous Muslim unit of analysis situates the colonial spirit of Western Christendom and then Europe alongside coloniality - and not Christianity itself - as a defining factor of colonial world.

5-Abdur Rahoof Ottathingal, Doctoral Fellow, Institute for History, Leiden University

rahoofcmd@gmail.com

Re-citing Sufism in Kerala: Islamic vernacularism and ethical trans-formations of a community

This paper argues that until the reformist reframing of religious discourses in the 20th century, the prominent forms of Islamic life in Kerala kept strong allegiance to Sufi frames of reference. And Sufism found its social presence mainly through popular texts of 'recitation' in Malayalam, before people were mobilized to 'reading', (and of course writing), way before the mass culture of print. In time, Malayali Muslim men and women began to perform as a vernacular religious community around these supposed moral manuals. These were not individually read books, but collectively recited hagiographic poetry, written by elite scholars for the ordinary populace, using a conveniently converted Arabic script which clearly voiced Malayalam and Arabic sounds alike. These 'Arabi-Malayalam' texts translated Sufi stories of moral and ethical transformations for ordinary Malayalis, and appealed to the social aspirations of the lower caste subjects. The 'songs' which 'new Muslims' considered for ritual recitation were mainly allegoric narratives about exemplary Sufis who lived long ago and in far distant places. Living by this vernacular idiom of Islam effectively met both didactic and aesthetic purposes, resulting in the regional social conditioning of a 'community' around transregional Sufis and stories.

Through ethnographic consideration of the earliest hagiographies in Arabi-Malayalam, my study explores the ways in which Sufi-recitational practices by the newly convert Malayali Muslims (a 'social philology'?) transformed their ethical and moral, social and spatial orientations, and textured the formations of an Islamic community in Kerala. Instead of reading these religious practices as deviations that anticipated a modernity and its reformist liberations, my research in historical anthropology wants listening to the social and religious reasons of their recitations and to conceptualize the form of life these religious subjects created and inhabited, individually and collectively.

6-Ambili Anna Markose, Guest Faculty, Central University of Tamil Nadu

ambilianna@gmail.com

Memory, Material, and Historiography: Formulations and Political Discourses of Christianity in Kerala

This paper tries to examine how the idea of a melancholic memory is foundational to religious socialization and community discourses and how it translates Christianity into a political category in Kerala. Arguably, this formulation of the sacred through melancholia engages to a universal Christian epistemological paradigm of tolerance. For this, I try to understand the ways in which Christianity become a political identity and examines the genealogies of the engagement between political subjectivity and *belief* in the context of Kerala. It briefly reads through different strands of Christian communities in the region in terms of Christianity’s caste-community structurations as well as the religious underpinnings of the modern state wherein a hegemonic idea of community has been formed. The different narrative contexts of the interface between memory and historiography are elucidated by drawing examples from select literary narratives, community histories and public debates on Christianities in Kerala. These narrative contexts, in one way contests and destabilize the idea of secular modernity from within. *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation struggle 1958-59) is taken as a specific case to elucidate the modes and strategies of identity articulations of community through the category of belief and melancholic memories. By doing this, I try to propose that the legitimacy of Kerala Christian genealogies is predicated on melancholic memories epistemologically and experientially, which is pertinent to their self definitions and self articulations in the public sphere. And this melancholic memory tends to be foundational to community and the notions of sacred. How the sense of loss and absence structure the material and epistemic dimensions of Christianity in Kerala is my point of departure here. This analysis, thus also briefly attends to some of the questions and problems of mainstream historiography of Christianity in a postcolony.

7-Muhammed Niyas Ashraf, Doctoral Fellow, Freie University Berlin and DAAD Visiting Fellow, JNU

muhammed-niyas@bgsmcs.fu-berlin.de

Saintly/Sufi Piety in Mālā Literature: Muslim Liturgical Sphere and Cult of Sufi Saints

in the Nineteenth Century Malabar

The veneration of the Sufi saints was a prominent form of religious expression among the

Malabari Muslims or Mappilas. Their devoutness to a saint has manifested in composing

Mālāpāttu (Mālā means garland and pāttu mean songs), a devotional and hagiographical poetic genre extolling miraculous life of Sufi masters and local/regional saints, supposed to be reverently recited. Composed in Malayalam written in Arabic script, popularly known as

Arabic-Malayalam, its vocal performance during nērccas (annual celebrations in shrines with

an act of taking a vow) referred the genre also as nērccapāttu. While the ritual veneration in the shrine exhibited a sacred memory space of 'public' social setting, the hagiographical

commemoration in mālāpāttu enhanced a 'private' ritual reading ascertaining the concept of 'sainthood' (wilāya). In the Mappila mindscape, saints have honored as awliyā (friends of God) in a technical, ontological and cosmological manner and the writing of their lives was a literary act of saintly piety. This paper will focus on mālā texts portraying awliyā as the archetype of Islamic piety that every Muslim should emulate; a walī intimated with God, an active intercessor, and a barakā (spiritual blessing) laden personae of 'divine.' Their karāmat

(miraculous legendary) described in hagiographies inclined a belief that mālā should extend

saintly barakā and promised the readers to prevail under guidance and protection of their

sainthood. Borrowing Weberian charisma, this study explores saintly piety and remembrance of walī as a charismatic individual, a 'barakā- karāmat' laden personae whose divine blessings and miraculous deeds were befitted to accomplish spiritual desires and physical benefits of an individual or hopes of a community. This saint- charismatic sanctity developed with the concepts of walī, awliyā, wilāya, barakā, and karāmat in Mappila hagiographical tradition sanctioned internal canonization of sainthood and promoted the acceptable saintly paradigm of Islam. This paper mainly focuses on how the sainthood construction in mālā literature exhibit a flexible literary space for interaction of personal piety, saint worship, and social life in Malabar? Moreover, theologically how the recitation of mālā validate the significant role in the development of Sufi/saintly piety? From the social history perspective, how these 'sacred hagiographies' address and reveal facets of belief and attitude allowing us to understand the nature of traditions and why collective memory of saints associated them as an intercessor, guide, leader, and protector for Mappilas.

8-Syed Mohammed Faisal, Postdoctoral Fellow, International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore

write2faisal@gmail.com

Vasco Da Gama’s Gift(s): Anthropology of a colonial moment

The paper investigates the first meeting between Vasco da Gama and the southern Indian ruler Zamorin in Calicut. In the meeting Zamorin rejects the meagre gifts they present to him. The ruler demands that to trade on the coast of Calicut they should have brought gold and other precious items as gifts. There is a fundamental discrepancy in expectations from the gift exchange between the two. Vasco da Gama claims that he had voyaged to build alliances with Christian kings for trade. The king, not being Christian, does not comprehend this invocation of religious brotherhood, rather is offended and says ‘What gifts are these? Have you come to discover people or stones?’. This misunderstanding leads to breakdown in communication. Vasco Da Gama and his fleet are forced to flee, barely escaping the wrath of the King. Later years, they return and colonise with brute violence. The paper argues that Vasco Da Gama mistakes Zamorin to be a Christian as he invokes religious brotherhood as the basis of contract. His offer of contract draws on the trust produced by shared belonging to the Christian community. Hence, he demonstrates a certain incredulity to Zamorin’s gift based culture of constructing segmented-solidarities. Here, unlike the Christian context, gift transaction was a tool of mutual recognition and a licence to trade, enmeshed in one. The paper converses anthropology of exchange with the literature on kingship in India and beyond. It will analyse the distinctiveness of the political-theological conception implicit in colonial European trade cultures to understand the intolerance it produces. It then compares it to the significance of relationship between gifts/prestations, matrilineal kinship cultures and commerce in non-modern forms of exchanges on the west coast of India.

**9-Nandagopal Menon, Research Fellow, Center for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen**

**nandagopal.menon@cemis.uni-goettingen.de**

**Who is a Wali? Sectarianism, Kinship and Social Imaginaries**

 Disagreements about the recognition and veneration of awliya (saints) have defined the broad contours of intra-Islamic divisions through the centuries and have triggered innumerable polemical/apologetical discourses, formation of rival theologies, organisations and educational institutions. Given this background, my paper presents an ethnography of a controversy about the growing tomb of a Kerala alim (religious scholar) and the resultant conflict between his male children/grand children who belong to two different theological streams within the faith - one of the traditional, Sunni school that endorses the incident as a karamat (wonder) and proclaims the alim is a wali, and the rival modernist, reformist Jamaat-e-Islami who reject the incident as a manipulation of the grave and the precursor to the intitiation of an unIslamic practice of awliya 'worship' and tomb visitation. I use this controversy to think how the making and unmaking of the alim as a wali, of intra-Islamic fissures and of kinship bonds are processes that are inseparable from one another, and also to reflect on the imaginaries articulated by the figure of the wali who often exceeds and escapes the grasp of his familial and theological kin.

10-Visakh M S, PhD Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras

visakhms2009@gmail.com

Configuring Religious Authority: Embodied Knowledge, Neoliberal Developmentalism and the Place of Ulama in Sunni Muslim Self- Fashioning, Kerala, South India

The paper seeks to explore how a traditionalist Sunni Muslim group in Kerala configures religious authority of ulama through a new discourse on embodied knowledge and its personalized transmission. Coupled with an intra-Islamic critique of Islamic reformism and ‘western’ modernity, such traditionalist attempts aimed at refashioning the religious authority of ulama foreground the embodied, culturally embedded, spiritual, ethical and affective aspects of ‘traditional’ Islam in Kerala. First, the paper delineates this new traditionalist discourse on the religious authority of ulama and its implications on the Sunni Muslim self-fashioning in Kerala’s socio-cultural milieu. Second, the paper explores the socio-political conditions that facilitate the emergence of this new traditionalist discourse and argues that it needs to be located in the context of the wider socio-economic change within the community, facilitated by structural as well as cultural forces of globalization viz. heightened transnational connections, cultural and intellectual flows, proliferation of electronic media and in particular, the growth of a neoliberal economy. These transformations brought about by globalization have entailed the emergence of a traditionalist ulama class with expertise in both religious and secular education and given a new impetus to the traditionalist configuration of the authoritative in Islam. The traditionalist ulama class plays an instrumental role not just in providing legitimations to the traditionalist notions of the authoritative but also by grounding it within the discourse of neoliberal developmentalism in Kerala. The final section of the paper looks at the implications of the traditionalist refashioning of the religious authority of ulama to the Muslim community in Kerala, critically exploring their engagement with state, civil society and public sphere. How do we understand these engagements vis-à-vis the emerging relationship between the secular and religious within the community in the socio-political context of contemporary Kerala?

11-Anish. V. R., Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, S.A.R.B.T.M Govt. College, Koyilandy

anish.vr1@gmail.com

Myths, religious beliefs and formation of a caste: Intersection of Subalternity and belief within Pulayas, a case study from South Kerala

The paper attempts to explore the relation between myths of origin, various types of religious beliefs/forms (caste practices, priesthood or deity forms) and their role in constituting and permeating a self-portrait of a caste. The study is based on the field work (with limited sample size) conducted from random interviewees drawn from the Pulaya caste of Southern Kerala particularly districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam. The study aims to investigate how the idea of being in a subaltern position (in this case a Pulaya person’s conscious expressiveness regarding one’s caste or religious identity need not necessarily be subordinate) produces a sense of concreteness-a sort of *self-definition*-across time and space, which embodies both verification as well as escapes it. Through narrating stories of caste-origin or primordial claims regarding ownership of land/decline of caste position Pulayas towards a narrative composed of a golden past, a stage of stagnation, decay and subsequent decline common to many castes. However, importantly within these stories is the *belief* of the existence of a concrete image of a Pulaya (persistent through myths of kings, legends, of heroes worship and deeds of ancestors). Such a narrative a never a distant element but is always contemporaneous with the present. The paper attempts to explore how religious myths have been continuously drawn to portray an image of a Pulaya and their role in producing a state of subalternity ((containing both elements of resistance as well as consent). It attempts to relate between subalternity and religion; how has been nurtured through religious beliefs reinforcing conditions of dominance as well as challenging them. The paper attempts to explore the role of myths and rites in perpetuating a state of subalternity one that legitimizes subordination, but one that also provides window to engender scope for constructing resistance via elements inherent to these same myths or rites. Through exploring subaltern religious beliefs/myths etc. the paper attempts to explore the nature of subaltern consciousness, how power relations operate through subalternity (religious beliefs) through co-opting and subjugating it and how they are contested by the subaltern. The paper beyond the case study, aims to delineate how religious rites/myths or common sense (a category used by Gramsci to point to the wide world of folklore, popular religion) acts as a parallel world of experience to, composed of categories often unbounded or indeterminate pointing towards indefinite categories used by people in everyday life which have been prevalent for long time in Kerala.

**12-Abhilash Malayil The Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**abhilashmalayil@gmail.com**

Mī(n)māṃsa: Fish-Meat, Naṃbūtiri Ritual and the Early Modern Political Conflict in Cāttirāṅkaṃ

Cāttirāṅkam (also known as Sanghakaḷi) is one of the obscured art-forms of the Malayalam-speaking Brahmins or the Naṃbūtiris. It was often referred to as a ‘new’ variety of ritual performance involving group-dance, formalized acting and utterance, and is staged exclusively by ordained groups (*yōgam*) of young Naṃbūtiri men. The site of performance has also marinated a visible trait of exclusivity that Cāttirāṅkam was always staged in (aristocratic) Brahmin households (of southern Malabar and of the Princely Cochin) on certain ceremonial occasions and viewed exclusively by a group of the commensal Naṃbūtiri audience. Cāttirāṅkam performers combine aesthetic and textual elements that have been adapted, and at times found improvised, from a diverse set of (early)-Medieval sources. They include the antique routines of the Vēda chanting prevalent in Kerala, foundational stories remembered in Purāṇic and Kēraḷōlpatti corpuses, the custom of music and dance patronized in Keralite temples, theatrical aspects of the regional drama (*nāṭakam*) and martial-arts, and certain highly stylized verbal formulae of the royal Grandhavari prose as well as the localized folk-satire. This paper will examine the literary texts of Cāttirāṅkam or the Cātṛāṅkasārāṛṇavam and argue that a significant section of them were either composed during or had been informed by an important early modern political conflict. I will, in particular, look at the sections describing long verbal exchanges between Sūdra Lords (named Iṭṭikkaṇṭappan and Marattaṅkōṭan) and Brahmin ‘questioners’ (*cōdyakkāraṛ*) of the plot, and propose that these exchanges bleed a history, perhaps a not-so-well-understood history, of the Sūdra-Brahmin conflict and competition. It is already known that the early modern period (i.e. 16th to 18th centuries) witnessed the structural ascendancy of cultivating and even the low-brow warrior groups and this, as it was pointed out from Southern Maratha, Tamil and Telugu settings, was instrumental in giving birth to trans-local Sūdra (land)-lordships with a high mobility aspiration. What perhaps is lesser known among the researchers are the nuanced Brahmin responses to this extended moment of political mobility and new-richness, especially of those social segments which were once servantile or subordinate to the charismatic Brahmin intuitions. One of the standard explanations tells us about the functional resilience of (literate) Brahmins in the new Sūdra dispensations as *niyōgi* agents performing scribal, ministerial and commercial portfolios, and these involvements gradually resulting into the creation of what this paper would like to call ‘an early-modern-Brahminhood’. However, the Cātṛāṅkasārāṛṇavam material will help us to see a different, if not a regionalised, strand in the collective Brahmin response to the Sūdra ascendancy. As it is visible in the Marattaṅkōṭan- Cōdyakkāraṛ exchanges, the regional Naṃbūtiri world was adventurous enough to parodize its own ritual-social existence through a parvenu Sūdra mirror. Interestingly, these acts of parodization were taking place at a non-carnivalesque setting. In other words, the re-scripting ‘Mīmāṃsa’ as fish-meat (*mīnmāṃsa*) in Cāttirāṅkaṃ was not a mere *hāsya*-inducing activity or a minor play in the age-old *yamaka* ornamentation.

13-Levin Mary Jacob, **Research Fellow, PhD, Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad**

levinmjacob@gmail.com

Women’s Mission for Women: Translating Protestantism, Values, and Domesticity for the Syrian Christian Women in nineteenth century Central Travancore, Kerala

The travel routes to India from the Middle East and Europe were not only meant for trade but also acted as prime means of contact between people and various cultures. These cross cultural exchanges through which Christianity entered India gave way to the development of the one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Tracing their origin back to 1st Century AD, these Malayalam-speaking natives of Kerala use Syriac and Greek for liturgical purposes; their religious practices and culture are influenced by Christians of East and West Syria, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and later by the European models of Christianity. The interest of this study lies where this native group of Christians came into contact with the Europeans. Taking Protestant mission as the focal point, this study examines areas of mission, education and health where English women missionaries interacted with the native Syrian Christian women during the nineteenth century. Divided by asymmetrical power relations, language, cultures and beliefs, their interaction with the natives proved a crossing over of the Protestant discourse into the native language, into its sense of religion and identity. This period witnessed the *movement* of the Syrian Christian women of Kerala from their *homes* to the *public sphere*. With an analysis of the missionary discourse, my attempt is to understand how the English women translated concepts of religion and gender for the native Syrian Christian women. The paper also utilizes various materials collected from archives such as reports, letters of women missionaries, journals, and literary texts to trace what is lost and gained in this interaction; to understand the challenges of such a translation; and to consider how one’s identity might be preserved or rebuilt.

14-Sonja Maria Thomas, Colby College & Carmel Christy Kattithara Joseph, Kamala Nehru College

smthomas@colby.edu; carmel.christi@gmail.com

Indriappam and Vindaloo: Caste and Food Culture among Kerala “Christians”

This joint-paper examines practices of so-called communal harmony through food and casteist food practices. Food often defines communal boundaries, and crossing those boundaries is assumed to engender a bridging across religions. In Kerala, the religious holidays of Onam (Hindu), Eid (Muslim), and Easter (Christian) are marked by food sharing practices and thus, are celebrated as signs of communal harmony.

However, Kerala is simultaneously rife with casteist food practices. Food has been a site through which the pure/impure dyad of the Brahmanical caste system is sustained. From “Brahmin” sambar powder, to caste segregation while dining, Kerala’s so-called communal harmony is splintered along caste lines. In this paper, we examine how “Christian” food practices are a misnomer. A look at the food culture of Latin Catholics in different parts of Cochin shows how food connects: even Latin Catholics who have moved from the shores due to displacement and otherwise, retain their food habits. But this same horizontal connection of food is one of the sites which constitute them as the less Hinduised, lower-caste “other” of the widely recognized upper-caste Syrian Christians. While Syrian Christians are also (largely) non-vegetarians, there are numerous food related practices through which their dominant-caste status is reiterated. For example, while Syrian Christians may readily *share* food with Nayar Hindus during Easter, they historically *give* food to Dalit Bahujan workers (including Latin Catholics) in the form of indriappam at the back kitchen. Prevalent food preparations such as vindaloo for Latin Catholics are absent from restaurant menus, while Syrian Christian cookbooks are found in almost every bookstore. These omissions points to the larger invisibility of the Latin Catholic community in the Kerala public imaginary of “Christianity.” Thus, the authors contend that when we examine food practices and so-called communal harmony in Kerala, we must do so through an anti-caste lens.

15-Roopesh O.B., Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai

roopeshkappy@gmail.com

Producing the Hindu temple: didactics, changing priesthood, and public performance

Many priest-training centers have emerged across Kerala providing instruction in temple rituals. The older centers admitted only Brahmins, but some new institutions have been established exclusively for non-Brahmins. The coming of non-Brahmins to temple priesthood is a significant change. The training of priests in these institutions follows the structure of the modern educational system. The experts like trained priests on temple rituals and astrological practices like *devaprasnam* establish ritual authenticity and emphasis the priesthood based on the texts like Tantrasamuchayam through public acts. The public act such as *devaprasnam*, *puja* produce consent on the ideology of temple rituals. Not only trained priests and astrologers involved in didactic process but also other forms of narrative methods such as speech, Veda classes, Religious schools are using as disciplinary approach. It shapes the believers, idea of temple, rituals and Hindu. These are didactics emerged and circulated widely through Kerala temples. Progressive intellectuals, rationalists and science activists often situate this as a return to past religious order. Most of these understandings place religion as a nonmodern articulation. I often encountered this during my fieldwork. The paper locate the abovementioned phenomenon as a new and significant change in temples. I argue that this is a process a) producing and establishing a new institutional practice and priesthood; b) constituting authentic temple rituals and authority of temple rituals through the public programmes and consent making activities, and c) produce temple centered Hindu believers through various instructional methods. It seems or creates an impression among both believers and criticizers as a continuation of traditional practices. I argue that this is a break from past practices and a process reshaping the institution of temple and Hindu in modern ways.

16-R. Harikrishnan, Ph.D candidate in Visual Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University

hari88krishnan.r@gmail.com

Immanence and Transcendence Instituting Regional Constituencies: A Study of Temples in Oṇāṭṭukara

The emergence of regional principalities after the disintegration of the Second Cēra Empire was germane to a common political, economic and religious precedence to individual Nāds. Cultural markers embedded in the locale and informed especially by the dominant religion, sanctioned by the kingship in these Nāds, brewed its essence. The erstwhile regional polity of Oṇāṭṭukara (11th-17th century C.E.) in Kerala, consolidated as Odanādu under the tutelage of the later Kayamkulam kings, was one such principality. This paper seeks to analyse select temples in this region as being symptomatic of different sectarian, class and kinship affiliations that go into the making of a cultural geography of the region. In doing so, I intend to situate the unified principality as a composite unit of esoteric faiths manifested in immanent (e.g. the concept of Parabrahma at the hypaethral Ochira temple) as well as transcendent (e.g. the mūla dēvatā pratiṣṭa of a Śiva linga at the Kandiyūr Śiva temple) forms. The temples I focus on are selected to understand the social history of art and religion: at once a product of the region as well as determinants that give the region its identity. They are symptomatic of several others belonging to similar cultic affiliations and ritual practices. As such they would range from the most brahmanical (e.g. temples with three śīvēlīs like Harippād Subrahmanya temple) to the least brahmanical (e.g. temples where toddy and meat are offered like Maṭṭam Mahādēva temple) in order to reach broader historical and sociological conclusions on how people interacted with these temple complexes within the regional polity of Oṇāṭṭukara.

17-Salah Punathil, Assistant Professor at the Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad, and Post- Doctoral Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen

salahpunathil@gmail.com

Violence among Religious Communities in Kerala: Beyond the Binary of ‘Secular’ and ‘Communal’

The question of inter-community relationships and conflicts are relatively ignored subjects in the studies on Kerala society; the limited studies on inter-community relationships among the various religious groups present Kerala as a distinctive place where various communities co-exist peacefully. While the pacifists’ claim in Kerala is true to a great extent in terms of inter-community peace in the inland society, they apparently ignore the history of coastal regions, especially of the southern belts where conflicts and manifest violence among religious communities have been frequent since the beginning of the 20th century. The first part of the essay attempts to contextualize the social identities of religious communities in the coastal Kerala as embedded in their unique historical and social conditions to explain the emergence and prevalence of conflicts and violence. The second part of the essay demonstrates how the ‘secular’ state in post-colonial Kerala has been engaging with this perpetual violence among religious communities and how the ‘secular’-‘communal’ binary has been reproduced through various discursive forms. By doing this, the essay aims to demonstrate how the notions implicit in the framework of ‘communal’ hinges on Orientalist and nationalist paradigms problematically deployed on the unique cases of conflicts and violence between communities in the specific context of Kerala.

18-Nirmala V.U., Assistant Professor in Political Science at Post Graduate Government College, Chandigarh

nirmala.vu@gmail.com

In Search of Silver Lining: The Communist Discourse on Social Harmony, Dissent and Heterodoxy in Religion

The popular perception of communist engagement with religion is based on the understanding that Marxism and religion are incompatible. Marxism is often equated to a materialist atheist project. This makes it difficult for the communist parties to work in overtly religious societies. When we look at the context of Kerala society and polity, one can see a repetition of the observation as said above, but the communist party hold a political strength. In addition to the theoretical obstacles in the popular perceptions as said above to forge a relationship with religion, there are many practical issues also involved in this matter. Interestingly it was not only the religious orthodoxy, which criticised the communists for their interventions and engagements with religion, but also the rationalists. When the rationalists and other progressive sections of the civil society perceived the communists’ engagement in religion as inadequate, the religious orthodoxy, institutions and political organisations considered it as interventionist. In the majority of these instances, Marxism was equated to hyper rationalism, atheism and crass materialism, thereby equated it to modern as opposed to the indigenous traditions of the local society. It will be interesting to study what constituted the communists' approach to religion in this context. By looking into the communists' approach to religion, I am attempting to understand how they mediate between the modern and the tradition in the context of Kerala. To focus this enquiry, I will be looking into the communists' narratives on *Theyyam*, a form of possession ritual familiar to the North Malabar region of Kerala. There are many studies on the engagement between communists and religion, even in Kerala which focuses mostly on the Messianic religions, especially Christianity*. Theyyam* is a ritual free from the elements of prophetic messianism. Therefore it enhances the scope of looking at this as a case for probing the communist engagement and knowing many new aspects of the relation between communists and religion. The paper aims at delineating the communists’ construction of a narrative of social consolidation, dissent and heterodoxy in the ritual performance and their strategy of mediating between the binaries of modern and tradition. I am also trying to understand how the communists nativised Marxism through their discourse on religious rituals, and the religion also presents itself in manifold ways before the Marxists.