

Language and Lesser Forms of Language: Arabi-Malayalam Negotiating the Canon with Malayalam :literary Listoriographies

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Abstract:

This chapter examines the formative relations between Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam, a scriptorial variant of Malayalam that employs Arabic script and popular among the Mappila Muslim community of Malabar region of the present Kerala. As a linguistic form of peculiar scriptorial pattern and ethnic-religious affiliation, Arabi-Malayalam had been invariably been overlooked, appropriated, and misrepresented in seminal documentary records of Malayalam such as historiographies, dictionaries, etc. This has undoubtedly been conducive to the near-extinct state of the linguistic form. This particular paper examines four selected major literary historiographies of Malayalam written across a span of almost a century, i.e. the ones written by P. Govinda Pillai (1881), R. Narayana Panickar (1941), Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer (1954), and Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker (1977). This will not only facilitate a diachronic view of the mutualities between both the linguistic forms, but also shed light on the continuities and disjunctures between them. Consistent across these works is the appraisal of Arabi-Malayalam as no longer part of ‘the language’ or as a *lesser form of the language*. This practice of lessening, the paper argues, was administered through a continual discursive praxis of historiographical manoeuvring and selective documentation. The paper emphasises the act of ‘folklorization’ which serves the Mappila literary practices in Arabi-Malayalam to be temporalised in a primitive pre-modern time and space on the literary timeline of the region. Hence the category of folklore is discerned not only as an aesthetically driven one, rather a politically motivated one as well.

Keywords: Folklorisation, Literary historiography, Narratology, Arabi-Malayalam, Malayalam

The formation of a linguistic entity and literary canon gets predominantly instituted by the seminal works such as dictionaries, literary historiographies and grammars which assign certain shapes to the materialities of a language out of a fluid, hitherto unresolvable and uncertain practices of expressions and vocalisations within the porous boundaries of a specific region. Beginning with an examination of the larger phenomenon of this discursive, historiographical and historical appropriation of hegemonic social groups exercised over their lesser counterparts in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Kerala, a time marked for its significant developments in the consolidation of linguistic and literary practices along with the advent of modernity and print culture, the paper intends to arrive at an analysis on the historical positioning of the literary engagements in Arabi-Malayalam by the Mappila Muslim community of Kerala in the mainstream metanarratives of Malayalam, the official language of the region.

This paper puts forward certain concerns on the phenomenon of underrepresentation and absence of the literary-artistic engagements of Mappilas in the historical narratives of the region. This polemic of underrepresentation and absencing are addressed as being validated through a series of socially, politically and linguistically mediated negotiations. In the context of the present Indian state of Kerala and its official language Malayalam, the making of an 'official' linguistic-literary form has evolved through certain evolutionary developments pertaining majorly to the discursive traditions of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the state along with the advent of print culture and modern educational system. This period also coincided with a considerable spurt in the publication of literary histories of Malayalam that turned really central in laying the foundations of the language as an organised medium of scripted communication.

A short ethnolinguistic profile of Arabi-Malayalam

Prior to beginning with the main concerns, a brief outline of the linguistic cultural milieu of Arabi-Malayalam would facilitate a better understanding of the thesis of this paper. Arabi-Malayalam has been generally conceptualised as a scriptorial version of Malayalam used by the Mappila com-

munity of Malabar.¹ In other words, it is the “lingual-scriptorial form of Islamic pietistic communications and intellectual designs from the seventeenth century, and eventually became the *lingua sacra* of the Mappilas, that is the vernacular Muslims of Malabar” (Arafath, 517-18) Arabi-Malayalam inherently occupies an ambivalent disposition caught between its shared sundry linguistic characters. Grammatically and syntactically it has close conformity to the conventions of Malayalam, while it follows Arabic scriptorially and orthographically. However, it comprises a motley of vocabularies with origins of, apart from that of Malayalam and Arabic, Sanskrit and Dravidian languages such as Tamil, Kannada, and Tulu. West Asian and North Indian Islamicate languages Persian and Urdu have also been considerably influential. Arabi-Malayalam just got hemmed in to the Mappila religious community majorly for two reasons: firstly, its Arabic script deterred its expansion beyond the Muslim readership of the region, or rather it turned to a point of alienation, and secondly, the Islamic devotional comportment of the majority of the texts in it kept others aloof. But on the other hand, the abundance of pietistic texts and lithographic printing presses in Arabi-Malayalam was instrumental in fostering the communion of Mappilas as a community of believers (Arafath 518). Though the spread of Arabi-Malayalam is marked predominantly in Malabar, the region that currently includes six of the northern and central districts of Kerala, the language has itinerated even beyond that. Lakshadweep and southern Karnataka were among them. Some of the Mappila population in the Andaman Islands, most of who were deported from Malabar during the anti-British uprisings of early twentieth century, were also using the language. Arabi-Malayalam and its script got a stronger command by the advent of the printing presses from the second half of the nineteenth century.²

The very structural hybridity of Arabi-Malayalam reflects a trade and faith-induced cosmopolitanism with its effects spread across far-flung regions

¹ For a detailed reading on Arabi-Malayalam, see Ilias, M. H., & Shamshad, H. K. T. (2017). Arabi-Malayalam: Linguistic-Cultural Traditions of Mappila Muslims of Kerala, and Arafath, P. K. (2020). Polyglossic Malabar: Arabi-Malayalam and the Muhiyuddinmala in the age of transition (1600s–1750s). *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

² The first Arabi-Malayalam in Malabar was established in Thalassery in 1869 by a certain Theppoothil Kunjahammad who was trained in the Basel Mission’s press at Thalassery (Kareem and C.N. Maulavi 45).

of East Africa, Arab Gulf,¹ South East Asia and even the Persianate² cosmo-
polis. These cross-border encounters, animated through both oceanic and
terrestrial trajectories, have been majorly influential in the making of the
language and its components. Since the first identifiable Arabi-Malayalam
text of as early as AD 1607,³ it has got a long trajectory of literature with
their productions and commerciality engaging with the Mappila readership
till date, though gradually in decline lately. The works in it concerned solely
with Islamic devotional thematics till 1872, a year that is marked with pub-
lication of Moyinkutty Vaidyar's *Badar al-Munir Husn al-Jamal*, a romantic
epic of Persianate origins. It was followed by scores of literary productions in
various forms and genres of fiction and non-fiction such as novels, articles,
reports, newspapers, poetry, etc. By mid-twentieth century, with the forma-
tion of new political states and the resultant new nationalist sensibilities,
languages also got reconfigured along those lines. Kerala as a modern state
came into being in 1956 on the basis of language amalgamating different
political units: princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and Malabar and
South Canara, two districts of Madras Presidency. The existing dominance of
Malayalam as a language was further reinforced by this reconfiguration of

¹ Early Arab travellers have been influential in the formation of various linguistic forms across the littorals they had been commuting through, such as Arwi (also known as Arabu-Tamil) which is popular among the Muslim communities of Tamil Nadu. For more readings on Arwi, see Tschacher, Torsten. "From Script to Language: The Three Identities of 'Arabic-Tamil.'" *South Asian History and Culture*; Zubair, K. M. A. Ahmed. "Arabu-Tamil or Arwi Language: Its Alphabet, Letter Formation, Ligatures, Combining Procedures, Phonetic Equivalents, and Specimen Writings— A Study." *Jamal Academic Research Journal: An Interdisciplinary*.

² The term 'Persianate' is a neologism ascribed to Marshall Hodgson. In his work *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Volume 2) he introduces it thus: "The rise of Persian had more than purely literary consequences: it served to carry a new overall cultural orientation within Islamdom.[...] Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims [...] depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call all these cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, 'Persianate' by extension." (293). With this idea, geographically the area ranging from the Balkans to the eastern borders of India, where Persian as a language had considerable currency, could fall under its purview. But, though beyond this region, Malabar cannot be pushed out of 'the Persianate' since Persian has made ripple effects in the region in varied aesthetic and literary manifestations, though not explicitly linguistically or literarily.

³ The first text found in Arabi-Malayalam is *Muhyuddīnmāla* written by Qadi Muhammed of Calicut. For more details, see Arafath, "Polyglossic Malabar".

political units and linguistic remappings. Literary productions in Arabi-Malayalam considerably dropped by this age and it gradually began to survive through few liturgical practices among the Mappilas. At the present, the literary production in the language is almost virtually nil, but certain performances and religious practices among Mappilas, where Arabi-Malayalam texts are central, keep it alive, though at a gradually declining pace. This study argues that this downfall of Arabi-Malayalam is significantly precipitated, along with the mentioned political reconfigurations, by the narratological discourses and historiographical manoeuvres of the literary history of the region. In other words, Malayalam literary historiographies have been playing a definitive role in demarcating the contours of the language, setting its formal and literary standards, which in effect exclude certain vernacular and dialectal varieties which otherwise are deemed parts of a whole.

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This paper intends to hinge the discussion on four Malayalam literary historiographical works that have been published across the span of a century, namely *Malayālabhāshāchariṭram* (1881) by P. Govinda Pillai, *Kēralabhāshāsāhityacharithram* (1941) by R. Narayana Panickar, *Kēralasāhityacharithram* (1954) by Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, and *A Short History of Malayalam Literature* (1977) by Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker. This study hopes to examine the narratological interests and strategies that went into the making of these historiographical records and looks at the ways they establish ‘the canonical’ in the Malayalam literary pursuits. Alongside the process of narratological deliberations and historiographical craftsmanship, they happen to warrant the proscription of several literary forms and practices from what it states as ‘the literature.’ They also condition the establishment of a hegemonic order in the multilingual socio-cultural scenario, with the subjects of the proscription always being vulnerable varieties of the language that do not possess much currency inside the societal mainstream. Language practices of several social and racial minorities have, thus, been kept outside ‘the standard’ that these historiographies demarcate the boundaries of. This study will look at the negotiations that these narratological apparatuses made with language practices of the Mappila community of Malabar, along with other minor language practices in the region. The historiographical interference in the making of a standard language often combines with construction of two opposite extremes in the linguistic spectrum, segregating them to categories

of 'high art' and 'low art.' Those language forms that do not align with the majoritarian narratological interests were susceptible to be deemed low and thus substandard. Across these mentioned historiographical works, Mappila literary practices have invariably been labelled as 'folklore,' which I see as a lowly epithet ascribed to perpetuate this hegemonic order. This study would want to juxtapose the idea of 'folklore' as a narratological category and literary genre as well.

Drawing the contours of the language: Govinda Pillai's historiography

In 1881, P. Govinda Pillai wrote *Malayālabhāshāchariṭram* (i. e. *The History of the Malayalam Language*), the first ever literary historiography to be written in and of Malayalam. It was such a pioneering one in the field that the works that came subsequent to it could not afford to shrug it off. For Pillai, fashioning a historical record of a language for the very first time has apparently taken matchless efforts of not only archiving, but also of ascertaining what could be counted part of the language out of a number of regional and genric varieties. This very process of ascertainment cannot go bereft of authorial subjective inclinations and concerns governed by the space, time, race of the author and kind of the composition. Hence, the task of historiographical archiving is "more than mere 'mapping'. [...] It professes not only to represent but also to evaluate" (Harder 5). The archival project, which Harder names 'stocktaking,' is "not at all outside the normative and evaluative dimension of literary historiography, but rather a constituent and integral part of that dimension." (5). Contriving a 'comprehensive' textual foundation to a linguistic practice that is existent in amorphously fluid shapes is not only a monumental challenge, but an initiative that could attract the questions of representations and selections too.

Being the very inaugural text in the literary historiography of the language, Pillai's work embarked on a normative operation in defining and delimiting the contours of the realm of the Malayalam language and its literature. Pillai's prefatory note to the book enumerates what has persuaded him to take up this job of book-writing which he terms as 'archival business' (1). Firstly, he wanted to point out certain common mistakes and to standardise few variations in the uses of the language from the people who are not really mindful of its *swarūpam* (its inherent form or essence) and etymological derivations. Secondly, he wanted to convince the public that they were

mistaken so far in judging Malayalam as a language of no considerable significance. Thirdly, to commemorate the poets who have adorned Malayalam with their writings. Fourthly, to revive the poems which have fallen to oceans of oblivion, and fifthly, to inspire people to write such literature of good quality.

Govinda Pillai prefaces the work pointing to a timely necessity to address a concerning lacuna in the *pramāṇam* (i.e. authoritative texts) of the language “induced by a lack of any such efforts from the elderly knowledgeable scholars in the field” (2). He suggests that in order to have a venerable present, one needs to have an impeccable understanding of the past which is what he is attempting to do through his historiographical enterprise. In his attempt to ‘revive’ the literary domain of Malayalam, he appears to persuade the *Malayālīs*, the reader community, to conceptualise the past as something against which they define their present and envision their future. He opens up a categorical possibility for structuring the ‘unorganised,’ ‘amorphous’ and ‘forgotten’ domain of a language practice which they all are part of or being made part of, constitutively through the process (of structuring) by invoking a common past to establish a sentiment of communion.

Literary histories are as much part of the literature as they are part of the genus of history too. Pillai’s historiographical concern is not an odd development, rather it could be seen as corresponding with a similar vein unfolding in the linguistic and political milieu of the region. Such a historiographical impulse could also be simultaneously traced in recording regional socio-cultural histories too. Vaikkath Pachu Moothathu published his *Tiruvitāṅkūr Charithram* [*A History of Travancore*] in 1867, P. Shungoonny Menon’s *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* was published in English in 1878 and Tanjore Madhava Rao published his *The History of Travancore from 904 to 973 M.E.* in 1873. All three of these historical works were royalist histories that centred on the history and times of various Rajas of Travancore Kingdom. It is in this wider spatial and temporal context of historiographical impulse that Govinda Pillai’s literary history needs to be placed in. It could probably be not a coincidental turn of things as we note that all these works take place in Travancore, the southernmost part of the present Kerala, where Pillai is also based.¹

¹ It is important to take note that Travancore, the southern province of Kerala, and the central province Kochi were ruled by native Rajas, while the northern province Malabar

Apart from being merely pedagogically motivated, these historical records have conspicuous political and regional interests that are responsible for their making. Their conceptualisation of the region and the language have definitely not taken into consideration what lies beyond their political and regional immediacy. As the centre of concern in these historical narratives revolved around the south of the present Kerala, provinces like Malabar did not figure in them, perhaps for being a political body outside their kingdom at the time. As for Pillai's historiographical enterprise, these histories must have been influential and directing his narratological concerns. Though Pillai named his work as *Malayālabhāshāchariṭram*, literally translated as 'History of Malayalam Language,'¹ his elaborate detailing of literature does not extend beyond linguistic varieties of the dominant social class of the region, majorly the southern Kerala. Though there are references of northern regional language varieties in his work, they are portrayed as not as mature as the southern Kerala dialect. Pillai also goes to the extent of the caste dynamics in the language along with its coupled implication in the merger of Tamil and Sanskrit to Malayalam. Udaya Kumar, who has looked into Pillai's historiography in detail, writes that Pillai's book seems to be signalling two things: "firstly, it is impossible to write a history of Malayalam literature, in the way in which Pillai conceives it, without reference to the caste structure of Kerala society. Secondly, in his literary history, caste is seen not merely as a principle of inequality in pre-modern Kerala; it also functions as the horizon within which Malayali subjects are formed" (30).

Malabar as a region figures in Pillai's historical narrative as a detrimental element to the growth of the language. For him, Malabar being a doorway for Tipu Sultan to invade 'Malayalam,'² it has caused serious affliction to the language since his attack extended to the books, schools and namboothiri *illams* (119).³ Pillai ascribes two reasons to the undergrowth of the language

was under direct British rule as part of the Madras Presidency. It is only in 1956 that these states were reorganised on the basis of the commonality of Malayalam language to form the present state of Kerala.

¹ Purposefully or inadvertently, Pillai's title does not go along with the content of the book as its literal translation reads as 'History of Malayalam Language,' while he actually discusses the literature. However, he starts the work with regional history, followed by a brief note on the language history and then moves to the literature.

² Pillai uses the term 'Malayalam' interchangeably for the language and the region.

³ *Illam* is the residence of upper caste namboodiris.

in comparison to its neighbouring Tamil and Sanskrit: one, the deliberate neglect of the language by its own speakers, and the other, Tipu's invasion, which he perceives as an outrageous transgression to the otherwise coherent prosperous Malayalam language. Pillai elaborates on it saying that "Tipu along with a cruel and ruthless mob rushed into 'Malayalam,' and attacked a number of ancient temples of great repute and battered countless *pādashālas* (schools) where a number of Malayalam books written in *tāliyōlas* (palm-leaf manuscripts) were kept and a number of namboothiri *illams* were pounded, and made them convert to a religion which is more fatal than death." (119) For Pillai, *Malayālarāṇṇyam* (the land of Malayalam) was relieved of the impediment of Tipu and stepped out to a new age of *aḥhivridhi* (prosperity) only by the advent of the British (118).¹

Apart from this iniquitous featuring of Malabar as a turbulent political site, the region does not figure in Pillai's narrative neither as a linguistic category nor as a concerning literary space. It is evident that Pillai's work as a whole revolves around Travancore and its neighbouring locales from the South. The linguistic and regional imagination that Pillai presents in the historiography keeps its moorings secured in the south of the present Kerala, a region which had the advantage of cultural and thus linguistic supremacy at the time. Apart from the issues of comprehensiveness, Pillai's book contains a number of factual omissions which have also precipitated repercussions on the historiographical works that followed it. R. Raghunadhan says that Pillai in his historiographical project relies on certain myths and assumptions. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer² also points out to certain factual errors Pillai made in his work, along with substantiating evidences that refute his claims (See, for eg., Ulloor, vol2, p. 134).

Arabi-Malayalam is not accounted as part of the literary inheritance of Kerala or Malayalam in Govinda Pillai's work. Udaya Kumar, in his article on early literary histories in Malayalam and their normative uses of the past, also deliberates on this case. This exclusion "is symptomatic of a difficulty in incorporating the traditions of diverse communities into a shared history of

¹ When the northern part of Kerala had to go through these setbacks at the hands of foreign invaders, Pillai says, the other part of Malayalam (the South region) could resist it. Since the region has ocean in the south and west and high mountains in the east, Mohammadans and Maharashtrians could not intrude into the territory. (p118, my translation).

² Ulloor is a historiographer whose literary historiography is mostly considered the authority on modern Malayalam literature.

Malayalam literature” (Kumar 32). The very titling of Govinda Pillai’s work as “*Malayala-bhasha-charithram*” itself is either a mendacious scheme which attests to house everything that could come under the semantic purview of the umbrella term ‘Malayalam,’ or indicative of the idea that anything out of the histories of the language is no longer considered part of the standard form of it. Udaya Kumar observes this historical exclusion as not only animated on religious and communitarian lines, but also as interlaced with the regional caste dynamics too. “The emergence of a national literary history in Kerala did not work by means of a liberation from caste identities, but through a careful dovetailing of one with the other. While the ‘national’ is defined in terms of a broad scope, it is articulated through a specific set of indices by which a Brahminical tradition is disavowed and assimilated at the same time. Christian and Muslim literary initiatives of pre-modern Kerala could find hardly any place within this domain. Their identities were seen as too specific and alien to the spirit of the language and literary culture; it was only by attenuating these elements that their literature could become part of the universalist idioms of a national culture” (47-48).

Pillai’s work, being the first literary historiography in/of Malayalam, establishes a delineator definition of what is implied by ‘Malayalam’ by the mainstream literary narratological mechanism. Anything beyond the literary and geographical mainland is deemed exterior to it or shoved to the peripheries. The repercussions of the socio-cultural hierarchies and preferential approaches leave reflections on these omissions and absences that mar Pillai’s historiography too. Hence, the literary domain cannot denude itself of all its caste and communal identities.

Jumping on the bandwagon: historiographies in the twentieth century

P. Shankaran Nambiar wrote *Malayālasāhityacharitrasamgraham* (A Summarised History of Malayalam Literature) in 1922, and Attoor Krishna Pisharody wrote *Bhashāsāhityacharithram* (Mal. *A History of Bhāsha Literature*) in 1936. But, both of them did not get much popularity and acceptance as P. Narayana Panickar’s seven-volume *Kēralabhāshasahityacharithram* published between 1941 and 1954.¹

¹ His seven-volume *Kēralabhāshasahityacharithram* (Mal. *History of Kerala Language Literature*) was completed in 1954. It is notable that this work is what qualified him in 1955 to be the first Malayalam writer ever to receive a Sahitya Akademi Award.

As the first major historiographer to write Malayalam literary history after Govinda Pillai, Panikar's narrative is notable for following the suit of Pillai, with preferential approach to the Sanskritised Malayalam literary engagements. Though Panikar acknowledges the thriving sector of printing and publishing of Malayalam on the hands of Christian missionaries, he is hesitant to value their literary works.¹ Panikar is seen refuting the general scholarly take on Reverend George Mathen, a Christian priest and writer, who is widely considered one of the early proponents of the new prose style in Malayalam. He claims for the existence of an older tradition of Hindu writers before him. Panikar insists that the wide attempts, by other scholars in the field, to valorise Mathen is an evil-interested move to dismiss the rank of Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, a successful bridge-maker between Malayalam and Sanskrit literatures. The community underpinnings are discernible here in this contention. It is undoubtedly noticeable in Panikar's narrative that there is a glaring absence of a number of 'minor literatures' such as that of Mappilas. From Govinda Pillai's historiography to Panikar's one, the narratological scope of literary histories in Malayalam are seen to have not moved much to an approach inclusive of other 'minor' forms of literary-cultural practices inhabiting within the time and space of 'Malayalam.'

Another prominent literary history is Ulloor S Parameswara Iyer's massive five-volume work *Kerala Sāhitya Charithram* (1953) which is generally considered 'the comprehensive history of Malayalam literature.' Ulloor himself asserts in the first chapter that

"...though I have named the book '*Kerala Sāhitya Charithram*,' I have made the book a comprehensive one incorporating Sanskrit works of Keralite authors, apart from the Malayalam works of Keralites. Most of the *Mahākavikal* (great poets) of Kerala – such as Ādi Shankarācharya, Vilvamangalathu Swāmiyār, Melputhūr Narāyaṇa Bhaṭṭathiri, etc. – have written only in Sanskrit. If they are to be left out of the book, how would readers comprehend the real place that Kerala has in the literary empire? Hence, I will be equally trying to include works of Keralites in both these languages. Our predecessors [in historiographical writing] since Sarvādhikāryakkār Govinda Pillai have all walked the same broad generous path" (Vol-1, p6, my translation).

¹ It is notable that Christian writers, including the missionaries, wrote in simple Malayalam with less concern to the Sanskritised Malayalam variant.

Ulloor's definition of 'Kerala literature' does not transcend the scriptorial limits of Malayalam and Sanskrit, similar to the Govinda Pillai's method. But, it is worth mentioning that Ulloor's work makes an entry into a comparatively more inclusive space of literary imagination. He is the first historiographer to feature *Vadakkan Pāttukal* (Ballads of North Malabar; literally 'Songs of the North') in the folk songs of the region. Similarly, it is remarkable that it is by Ulloor's literary historiography that Mappilas' literary engagements got acknowledged as a literary artefact of *Malayalam* for the first time. *Māppilappāttu*, a song genre popular among Mappilas, has been given a considerably significant detailing.¹ As Ulloor's work facilitated for Mappila literary engagements an entry into the domain of mainstream literary imagination of the region and language, it was particularly consequential in terms of setting a trend of new historiographical impulse in the mainstream literary engagements in general, and in Mappila historiographical writings in particular.

Even though Ulloor's idea of Malayalam is accommodative of literary traditions peripheral to the dominant imagination at the time, his design seems to be generalising his hypotheses on folk songs of the North Malabar, and *Māppilappāttu* in particular. As for Arabi-Malayalam or Mappila literary traditions, it could only figure in the 'songs' section of his 'comprehensive' work, and more curiously only in 'folk songs.' Even though, it is notable that Ulloor has made a reference to the Arabi-Malayalam literary culture terming it 'Mappila-Malayalam script' (238) under the category of "folk songs,"² while Govinda Pillai's and Panikar's works did not acknowledge the presence of such a literary stream. Ulloor limits his account on Arabi-Malayalam to being "characterised by less phonetic purity owing to the amalgamation of

¹ For more readings on various aspects and sub-genres of *Māppilappāttu*, see Sutton, M. K. (2015). *In the Forest of Sand: History, Devotion, and Memory in South Asian Muslim Poetry* [Doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin].; Muneer, A. K. (2015). Poetics of Piety: Genre, Self-Fashioning, and the Mappila Lifescape. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*; Arafath, P. K. Y. (2020). Cassetted emotions: Intimate songs and marital conflicts in the age of pravasi (1970–1990). In *Cultural Histories of India: Subaltern Spaces, Peripheral Genres, and Alternate Historiography*.

² The lengthy section titled 'Folk songs' in Ulloor's historiography is divided into three segments which extends to eighty-four pages out of his 1200-paged work. Mappila literary tradition is categorically reduced to just poetry, folk poetry to be more particular, where it is counted as one among seventy-two genres of folk poetry in the language. No other Mappila literary genres have been given any reference throughout the whole work.

Arabic vocabulary, but by high sense of musicality” (vol.1, 238). And, the only other mention of Mappila in Ulloor’s work is in a mythical narrative where a Mappila is characterised as a robber and tries to murder a pilgrim who was on his way to Guruvayur temple (479). It appears that Ulloor’s historiography has fallen into the stereotypical images of Mappila orchestrated by the colonial and subsequent native discourses. Being an illustrious poet and littérateur himself and having brought up varieties of poetic practices from different ethnographical and regional peripheries to his work, Ulloor’s historiography could be expected to have a comprehensive approach for poetic traditions at the least. But, his blanket rationale shows a non-committal approach which does not purchase all the possible contingencies of the genre. The case of Arwi, also called Arabu-Tamil,¹ is not much different from that of Arabi-Malayalam. Torsten Tschacher has elaborated on the narratological impediments in inclusion of Islamic Tamil literature into the master narrative of Tamil literary history, which are often attributed to the former’s adoption of Middle Eastern topics and stories, expressions in Persian and Arabic genres, presence of Arabic loanwords, etc. (2010, pp. 71-77).

Concerning his take on Mappila literary-cultural practices, Ulloor’s work leads one to raise an issue of authenticity in two aspects: one, the historiography’s reductive approach to Mappila literary traditions, with entire corpus of Arabi-Malayalam literary practices being discounted as they are not ‘enough Malayalam’ or ‘enough Keralite’ as to be included in the work. This is significantly important as we recognise that a distinct general tendency of cataloguing Mappila or Arabi-Malayalam literary practices as folklore is discernibly seen among the mainstream Malayalam literary and cultural historiographies since Ulloor’s work. Two, the concerns about the cultural misrepresentation of Mappilas in the dominant native discourse as well as colonial records, of which Ulloor cannot be considered an aberration. The instances of the robbing Mappila mentioned above and the successive portrayal of aggressive ‘fanatic Mappila’ subjects are few of them.² This misrepresenta-

¹ Arwi is a dialectal variety of Tamil with script of Arabic and lexical and phonetic influences of Arabic.

² For detailed reading on ‘fanatic Mappila’, see Ansari, MT. *Islam and Nationalism in India: South Indian contexts* (2006) and *Malabar: Desheeyathayude Idapādukāl* (Malabar: Nationalist Engagements) (2008), and for a colonial narrative of the same, see Fawcett’s works “A Popular Mappila Song.” *Indian Antiquary*, and “War Songs of the Mappilas of Malabar.” *Indian Antiquary*. Stephen Dale also perceives ‘religious militancy’ as the most prominent

tion appears to be discursively more ominous than the utter absence of the representation itself. On a different note, I found it curious that Udaya Kumar, who has looked into the trajectory of literary historiographies in Malayalam, is reticent about Ulloor.

Since this paper looks at the Arabi-Malayalam literary practices of Mappilas, the focus is on its absence in the historical and archival documentations of the language and the state. The discursive dismissal of certain practices pushes them out of the realm of accepted standards of 'language' and 'literature.' A lacuna in the historical archiving of the literary-cultural practices of marginal communities exists unquestionably. Several of the marginalised sections are out of the purview of the mainstream literary standards and their concerns, such as Adivasis, scheduled tribes, Mappilas, etc. This purposive absences have not been a point of concern and critical engagements until the second half of the twentieth century, an age that witnessed a steady shift in the trends in the cultural and historiographical conventions.

On a similar note, A. P. P. Namboothiri, the noted critic of Malayalam literature, writes on the absence of Mappila literary practice in the mainstream literary imaginations: "Reading Malayalam literary history, one cannot find any indication of the existence of such a community or any literary work of theirs. The literary historiographies of *Mahākavi* Ulloor, R. Narayana Panickar, Attoor, and P. Shankaran Nambiar are silent about it.'(76) He also adds that "this might be resultant of a fact that these historiographers were *Savarna* Hindus who could probably not be aesthetically appealed by the content of this literature. Even Western scholars like Fawcett and Francis Buchanan have acknowledged such a literary tradition" (Ibid 77). The renowned literary critic and historian Sooranad Kunjan Pillai was one of the few mainstream scholars who expressed concerns about the exclusion of 'marginal' literary traditions from the mainstream literary historiographies and the necessity of their incorporation into archives of regional literary practices.¹

A slight shift could be seen in Malayalam literary historical imaginations since the 1950s and 1960s, with Mappila literary practices making appearances in the mainstream narratives. This could be perceived as part of

cultural characteristic of Mappilas, Dale, S. F. (1980). *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: the Māppilas of Malabar, 1498-1922*, p1.

¹ Sooranad, K. P. (1970). "Vaidyar's Literary Works". *Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar Samporna Krithikal*, [Mal. Moyinkutty Vaidyar Complete Works].

a larger discursive impulse that originated across Malayalam with an inclusive approach to the minor forms of literary practices and traditions. The formation of the Kerala state in 1956 integrating the erstwhile southern princely states of Travancore and Cochin and that of Malabar district of Madras Presidency has had induced a new trend of reimagining linguistic-cultural identity of the state, along with a new configuration of the geographical boundaries. Apart from that, the role of internal literary historiographies written from within minor literatures have also been able to make considerable impact on the mainstream literary imaginaries. For example, right from the 1970s, Mappila literary historiographical attempts had been under way. *Arabi-Malayala Sahitya Charithram* (History of Arabi-Malayalam Literature) by O. Abu was published in 1970, and *Mappila Malayalam: Oru Bhāshāmishram* (Mappila Malayalam: A Hybrid Language) by K. O. Shamsudddin in 1978. The most important breakthrough was the book *Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Paramparyam* (The Great Literary Heritage of Mappilas, 1978), a combined work by C. N. Ahmad Maulavi and K. K. Abdul Kareem, which has come to shape after a decade-long archiving project and ethnographic research. The work could instigate a momentous archival impulse among Mappilas, however, in the active hours of their migration from Arabi-Malayalam to Malayalam. In short, these archival projects and historiographical outset have been conducive to shape the mainstream literary imaginations of the region.

It is by the 1950s and through the 1960s that Arabi-Malayalam and Mappila literary productions signally loomed large into a space in the popular culture endorsed by the Malayali public sphere, which could be perceived through not only a gradually bulging heedfulness in the literary historiographies of the time, but through a number of popular art forms such as films and plays too. Often ignored is the fact that, of all the Mappila art and literary forms, *Māppilappāttu* has been spotlighted or has grown too large that other artistic and literary expressions got overlooked as a result. Of latest of the Malayalam literary historiographies, Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker's *A Short History of Malayalam Literature* (1977, revised in 2006) is pertinent in this context. Paniker also has gone to the extent of minimising or disparaging the whole of Mappila literary expressions to the singularity or rather homogeneity of *Māppilappāttu*, and his narrative squarely inclines to categorise it

as a genre of folk poetry (51).¹ Simultaneously, Paniker also admits that “The vitality of the folk tradition in historical times is demonstrated by the Moplah songs (*Māppilappāttu*) which have not only enriched the metrical resources of the language but also put special emphasis on *vīra* and *śrngāra* (heroic and erotic) *rasās*. Arabi-Malayalam language used in these Moplah songs establishes the quaint beauty of their melodies.” (19).

Apart from the mutual congruity among the discussed historiographies in reducing Mappila literary engagements to only *Māppilappāttu*, the tendency of ‘folklorising’ also is seen as sprawling out to Paniker’s narrative too. In this paper, I have brought to the analysis major historiographies of different time periods in order to foreground the successive phases of historiographical narrative impulse in Malayalam and Kerala concerning their approach to the marginal literary-cultural engagements with emphasis on Mappila literary expressions. The linguistic practices which existed outside the mainstream centre were regarded, throughout these historiographies, inferior in some fashion or the other. Either they were regarded as no longer part of the ‘language’ or they are *lesser forms of the language*. The process of this lessening was, I argue, administered through a continual discursive praxis of historiographical manoeuvring and selective documentation.

Folklorising as lessening the language

The act of ‘folklorisation’ of Mappila’s Arabi-Malayalam literary engagements by the Malayalam historiographical narratives has effected far-reaching ramifications in the ensuing cultural positionings of the very literary domain. This has not yet been attended in any of the scholarships on Mappila or Malayalam literary history. The exercise of ‘folklorisation’ has to be attended in a critical manner in order to make a historical understanding of how narratological and historiographical interests perform as stakeholders in the shaping of what we call ‘the history’ today. The very ambivalence in the varied conceptualisations of folklore is contingent upon the cultural and socio-political locations they are conceived in. Folklore, by and large, has

¹ Kerala Sahitya Akademi, the formal yet autonomous body to promote Malayalam language and literature, has not moved far from this position. The Akademi’s online library archive which hosts copies of hundreds of Malayalam literary works as old as 1772 has a perceptible dearth of Mappila literary works even in Malayalam, let alone works in Arabi-Malayalam. Refer to http://keralasahityaakademi.org/online_library_index.html

been figured as a compendium of orally transmitted cultural artefacts. Though scholars such as Alan Dundes are more concerned about who are “the folk”, they have considered the categories of parables, fairy tales, folktales, myths, fantasies, etc. as folklore. They all share the characteristic of orality in their transmission. It is no doubt that the ‘word of mouth’ or *viva voce* is the predominant central element in the very being of folklore. It is basically a tradition of *story-telling*.

The rhetoric of folklorisation in the literary historiographies and cultural narratives do not amount to make a claim that Mappila literary stream is a foreign category to the genre of folklore. Rather, I argue that the problem lies in the discursive imperative which facilitates the ascription of the idea of folklore on the Mappila or Arabi-Malayalam literary expressions as a monolithic category. This ascription deters the possibility of an understanding of Arabi-Malayalam literature beyond the typical connotations of folklore, confining its scope to a pre-literate, pre-modern, and purely oral category. This fragmentary comprehension of Mappila literature suggests a myopic approach that overlooks the growth of the literature beyond the ‘oral’ towards the ‘literary’, ‘written’ and ‘scripted’ occupations. So, I argue that the overwhelming presence of the oral and poetic expressions in Arabi-Malayalam literature, which could be named folklorish in a sense, should not obscure the instrumentality of prosaic expressions which have especially thrived in the print age parallel to Malayalam.

The blanket ascription of ‘folklore’ to the Mappila literary practices by these literary historiographies and apparatuses entails a problematic of generalisation. Apart from the desultory confinement of the whole Arabi-Malayalam literary corpus solely into the genre of *Māppilappāttu*, the folklorising also brings a double-sided conundrum to the table. It is not that there is no folklore in the Mappila literary, nor *Māppilappāttu* does not fall under the folklore as a category. But the way the historiographies delivered the subject is controvertible. Since ‘folk-lore’ is the ‘lore’ of the ‘folk’, i.e., tradition of the people, it could *prima facie* belong to ‘the people,’ i.e. ‘the indeterminate masses.’ Hence, the multitude of ownership or authorship also suggests the absence of a determined concrete authorship. This absence of an owner, or ‘authorlessness’ in other terms, makes the category of folklore a domain so vulnerable that it requires no social validation.¹ Since it is gene-

¹ Refer to Alan Dundes’s work ‘Who are the folk?’ for ideas about the authorship in folklore.

rated by ‘masses’, it could technically exist in varied versions across ages and regions being generated and transmitted through generations across different times and spaces. In other words, it is this plurality of authorship that capacitates an epic, a fantasy, a myth, a folktale, a lullaby, or a song to exist in multiple versions or renderings of which all could be regarded ‘equally true and original.’

This very indeterminacy in its essence places the folklore subordinate to the ‘authored’ works, the manned literary missions, at least in the modern conceptualisations of literary categories. As mentioned earlier, it is through Ulloor’s historiography that Arabi-Malayalam literary artefacts of Mappilas got some kind of representation in mainstream literary imaginations of Malayalam. But nonetheless Ulloor’s design categorically keeps it within the bounds of folklore. The only paragraph on *Māppilappattu* in his 1200-paged historiography also escorts an example with no authorial information or any reference. The passage in his work given as an example of *Māppilappattu* is actually taken from *Badr Padappattu* of Moyinkutty Vaidyar, a detail which cannot possibly escape the knowledge or attention of a *littérateur* like Ulloor for at least three reasons: (i) Vaidyar’s *Badr Padappattu* had attained so big a deep-seated popularity since the late nineteenth century itself, and (ii), *Badr Padappattu* had apparently sprouted out to a number of ritualistic and performative cultural manifestations of Mappilas by Ulloor’s age, and (iii), Ulloor himself has shown his acquaintance with Vaidyar’s works in his multiple writings. Hence, Ulloor’s linear and uniform narrative design of unnamed, authorless, folklorish *Māppilappattu* cannot be a dispassionate technical omission, rather it could be seen as an inherent part of a grand design of narratological scheme.¹

The lower categories in the hierarchy of literary-cultural expressions are signified in a number of terminologies such as ‘folk’, ‘traditional’, ‘popular’, ‘oral’, ‘verbal’, ‘subaltern’, ‘indigenous’, ‘vernacular’, etc. Ó Giolláin has

¹ The historiographical narratives emerged after Ulloor validated this point. Similar to the pace of Ayyappa Paniker, M. Leelavathi’s *Malayala Kavitha Sahitya Charithram* (History of Malayalam Poetic Literature, 1980) makes a reference to the whole of the Mappila literary tradition, categorising them as folk songs: “The folk songs of North Kerala include some *Māppilappattu* such as *Badr Padappattu*” (96). It is notable that Leelavathi’s is a work dedicated to the history of poetic literature unlike Ulloor’s, and yet *Māppilappattu* has not been featured adequately. In this case of Leelavathi also, there is the case of authorlessness, along with a near-absence of the genre altogether.

looked into the semantic nuances of these terms in reference to their place within modernity in some detail. “None of [these terms] corresponds to any notion of what is usually understood as high culture, but, on the contrary, they are usually seen as standing outside of or beneath it, geographically and socially circumscribed, and particularistic rather than universal. Nevertheless, these traditions have been a constant reference to modern societies, whether as the negative against which the modern must define itself, as an ideal of rootedness without which a notion of cosmopolitanism cannot really exist, as the authentic by which a people or a nation or a culture are defined, as a local excess that threatens the consolidation of the nation-state” (Giolláin, 79).

The overlapping connotations of these words always define themselves with juxtaposition of another set of literary-artistic variants which are culturally deemed superior and more universal, or in other words, they are defined in juxtaposition with a set of ‘high arts.’ The common denominator across these dictions is the premise that the literary-artistic creativity of these genres is not ascribed or cannot be ascribed to individuals. Apart from the artistic deficiency and inferiority, they also communicate an idea of communal and racial angle, as Raymond Williams observed, invoking a contrast between the ‘middle class of the mainland’ and the ‘indigenous folk’ at the racial and geographical peripheries. For Williams, ‘folk’ has the effect of backdating all elements of *popular culture*, and is often offered as a contrast with modern popular forms, either of a radical and working-class or of a commercial kind (93). Folklore could be ontologically an element deterrent to the existence of a universally relevant category since folklore does essentially provincialise and particularise the conceptualisation of literature. Folklore serves as a cultural excess and a literary category antithetical to the conceptualisation of the ‘modern’. In short, ‘folklorisation’ qualifies Mappila literary practices in Arabi-Malayalam to be temporalised in a primitive pre-modern time and space on the literary timeline of the region. Hence the taxonomy of folklore has to be discerned not only as an aesthetically inspired one, rather a politically motivated one as well.

The very ontological position of the category of folklore is informed by regionalist nationalist conceptualisation of the social classes and cultural identities. The colonial discourse has labelled any literary-artistic forms which resisted the hegemonic discursive practices as ‘nomadic’ or ‘folklore’. It is the formation of modern nation-states that instigated the origination of a

‘standard’ category coalescing all local varieties under one umbrella and repudiating the essentially differential identities of unassimilable heterogeneous cultural practices. The mechanism of standardisation was operated holistically in the inherently remote and diverse linguistic variants of the state. The variant that aligned with and favoured the administrative and majoritarian interests was accounted ‘the standard.’ The umpteen number of other varieties in the social, cultural, geographical margins of the societal structure tend to happen outside the standardised centre in a large schema of things. It is not that this hierarchy has supervened with an outbreaking effect of modernity, but modernity has posed a significantly detrimental challenge to the idea of co-existence of potentially equivalent regional linguistic practices.

The act of folklorising essentially constructs a lowly linguistic-literary variant and warrants the legitimacy of a ‘standard’ category. This sustained phenomenon of the hegemonic standardisation of linguistic and literary practices could be observed, like every societal contexts, as existent in the repudiation of lower social classes, cultural artefacts and identities. In the larger context of Malayalam literary formation, the casteist socio-cultural environment is culpable of positioning a number of works and literary varieties outside the spectrum of the ‘standard,’ apart from the Arabi-Malayalam literary engagements which this paper emphasised. From the very early times of Malayalam, the discursive praxis has been favouring the dominant social class. In his article on the birth of Malayalam as a language form, Freeman observes that *Līlātilakam*, the treatise which is believed to be the very first one ever written on Malayalam grammar,¹ registers a dialect split of *bhāṣā* (language) between a variety that is “crude” (*apaḥṛṣṭa*), spoken by the “ignorant,” versus the one that is “refined” (*utḥṛṣṭa*), current among the “educated,” with only the latter variety considered as Manipravalam, the dominant form (55). Socially, however, it also associates the refined language with the upper three caste-divisions (*traivarṇṇika*), and the unrefined with the inferior or degraded castes (*hīna-jāti*). Significant as this is in recognizing the caste-mapping of dialect strata within Kerala, *Līlātilakam* goes on to note that the phonology of the lower stratum is largely like the Tamil of the Cōlas and Pāṇḍyas (Freeman 55). This divisive juxtaposition of a high and low

¹ *Līlātilakam* is originally about the grammar and poetics of the Manipravalam language form, a precursor of modern Malayalam.

forms of language and literature facilitated the grounds for the latter narratological inclinations and historiographical essentialisations in the regional literary history of Malayalam.

Indulekha is widely considered the first ideal Malayalam novel across all major historiographies. This designation of an archetypal perfect novel enables *Indulekha* to perform itself as not only an exemplary masterwork of a coveted perfection which other works are destined to attain, but also to validate the cultural currency of the very content that the novel deals with. It is not that there had not been novels written before *Indulekha*, but there are narratological dimensions in its attributed designation which need to be examined in depth. A novel entitled *Thīrthādaka Purōgati* (translation of John Bunyan's English novel *Pilgrim's Progress*) by a certain Joseph Peat was published in as early as 1840, which deals with a Christian theological allegory. Mrs Collins' *Ghāthakavadham* (translation of 1964 English novel *Slayer Slain*) was published in 1877. Her work brought patriarchal Christian social life of 19th century Kerala to the discussion, with a vehement reproof on the dowry system prevalent at the time. *Chārdarvesh* by Muhyuddin bin Mahin was published in 1883 in Arabi-Malayalam. It contained a collection of Islamic allegorical stories adapted from the writings of Amir Khusrau, an Indo-Persian Sufi poet. Potheri Kunjambu's *Saraswathīvijayam* was published in 1887, which unequivocally challenged the casteist oppression of Dalits and encouraged their religious conversion. None of these novels had not been accorded a stature of a prototypical work in the genre of Malayalam novel. Rather, O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*, published in 1889, much later to all these works, has been marked as the trailblazer in the canon of Malayalam novel history. *Indulekha* is an articulation of a Nair *tharavādu* (ancestral household) and their privileged familial and social structure. The high pedestal that *Indulekha* was placed on by the historiographical designs has facilitated the Nair caste to pass off themselves as the ideal modern figure of the middle class Malayali. E. V. Ramakrishnan duly notes that "In an age when each caste had their own linguistic variant within the regional language, *Indulekha* unilaterally tries to make overtures to perceive other language forms through Nair language" (18). Udaya Kumar also offers observations on how the entry of lower castes to the Malayalam literary domain was resisted by upper castes (47). The repudiation as well as the acceptance of a literary work also goes along not only with the racial position of the author, but with the nature of the content it propagates too.

The question of author is placed at the centre of concern in the business of archiving and historiography in the modern literary enterprises. Author becomes the part of the idea s/he imparts as much as the very text s/he writes. In his article "What is an Author?" Foucault is concerned about the ideological figure of the author and his/her role in the making of the merit of the very text. He says "...there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity" (306). Nevertheless, for him, "as a privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science, the question of the author demands a more direct response" (300). The authorial question, as is clear now, is a modern imperative which has been employed on the domain of all literary expressions holistically without distinction of the contexts they were/are produced in.

Making of a canon/nation and its peripheries

The cultural and artistic corpus of a society gets shaped by a continuum of textual productions, reproductions, mediations, appropriations, interpretations, and interactions. Historiographical narratives bear a decisive role in determining their inclinations. Featuring, inclusion and exclusion in historiographical records monitor and condition the value that these works should be accorded. This very process filters out certain texts and leaves them out to the margins of 'the standard' that is set by these narratives. Thus, historiographical designs are responsible for creation of a strong stream of 'canonical literature' and setting a standard that other minor literatures ought to obtain.

The formation of a 'canon' or a 'national literature' is an accumulated result of continued appropriation of texts, their interpretation, circulation, etc. The impetus that goes into the very birth of 'the canonical' does also reconcile with the formation of the 'national', with their mutuality of interests and concerns. The French literary critic Pascale Casanova has elaborated on the intersections between the formation of a literary canon and that of a nation. A preferential treatment, by the state or the dominant social classes, to any of the many local variants in literary practices could validate its worth to be part of the 'national literature'. "The popular tales collected,

edited, reworked, and published by patriotic writers became the first quantifiable resource of a nascent literary space.” (Casanova 225). Constituting a linguistic structure for a newly constituted nation is an imminent need that arises. Like the selection of texts into a historiographical archiving, the making of a national literature embarks with these historiographies themselves. Historiographical undertakings are thus a necessary ingredient in a repertoire of items that were to constitute a language.

The correspondences between the ‘literary’ and the ‘national’ are mutually constituted and constitutive over and over. Modern nation-states have designated the physical spaces differentiating each other majorly on the basis of language, and thus linguistic symbols have grown to gain traction embedded with national and thus geographical confines to such an extent that out of which they are deemed mere invalid currency. The linguistic consolidation has drawn lines of exclusion on cultural and social practices which were inherently volatile and non-fixable to a demarcatable bound of geography or mass of people. Casanova invokes the notion of “verbal marketplaces” by the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov: “Nowadays sounds have abandoned their past functions and serve the purposes of hostility; they have become differentiated auditory instruments for the exchange of rational wares; they have divided multilingual mankind into different camps involved in tariff wars, into a series of verbal marketplaces beyond whose confines any given language loses currency. Every system of auditory currency claims supremacy, and so language as such serves to disunite mankind and wage spectral wars.” (19).

Hierarchisation of linguistic practices, cultural and social norms are as political as formation of the state. Preferential treatment to certain varieties of these practices essentially keeps the lesser ones outside the ‘standard’, thus getting pushed out to the peripheries being destined to keep on competing in order to attain the standard. The ‘homogenisation process’ involved in nation-building has washed out the identificatory differences among multiple vernacular varieties. The nation is essentially made on a fear of multiples, coercing the differences to a singularity which is unfailingly majority-oriented. As Habermas puts it, by politically activating people through the democratic legitimisation of the state, a national identity was able to compensate for destruction of the social integration that pre-modern identities provided (284-85). He has classified nationalism as a modern phenomenon of cultural integration created through historiography and narratives. The print techno-

logy in the colonial and subsequent times in India has played roles in inculcating a sense of nationhood in the masses. Nationalism as a machinery for integration and homogenisation of multiple peripheral varieties into a single central standard, has purposely been a means of exclusion, than that of assimilation, executed by a series of selections, interpretations, appropriations of texts, languages, and culture over time.

The phenomenon of underrepresentation and absence of the Arabi-Malayalam literary-artistic engagements of Mappilas in the historical narratives of the region cannot go bereft of the concerns about the political, communal, and majoritarian proclivities, in addition to the aesthetic ones. A sustained act of social, political and narratological mediations has left conspicuous bearing on the dismissal of such a literary tradition and thus a language altogether. Right from the earliest literary history of Malayalam in 1881, its major patterns have consistently remained across all of them, except for a slight, yet considerable, shift towards the inclusion of the Mappila literary into the Malayalam literary domain around the mid-twentieth century, but not enough to push it out off the verge of extinction. However, ascriptions such as that of folklorization really cater to invalidate certain language varieties as inferiors. It not only sustains the idea of aesthetic classifications, but also aligns with the larger political motives that favour the essentialist nationalist interests.

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