



## Contested Devotion

### The Praise of Sufi Saints in Three *Māla Pāṭṭūs*

This article examines three Sufi devotional songs (*māla pāṭṭūs*), from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, from the Mappila Muslim poetic corpus (*māppiḷa pāṭṭū*) of Kerala, India. Close examination of the Mappila song literature provides information and historical detail about a community for which there are limited noncolonial sources. More specifically, an examination of the content, poetic features, and changing mediums and performative contexts of these particular *māla pāṭṭūs* foregrounds the Mappila community's multivocal and complex religious development and history. The article also highlights the ways in which the process of folklorization is both transforming Mappila songs into commodities and simultaneously keeping the *māla* songs available via the internet, thus preserving these practices as cultural heritage and a living practice.

Keywords: Kerala—*Māppiḷa pāṭṭū*—Mappila Muslims—Sufism—Arabi-Malayalam—devotion—folklorization

Know that this *māla* will attract the highest virtues.  
Because of her greatness, sing her praise with respect.

(Excerpt from the *Nafīsat Māla*)

The Mappila (*māppiḷa*) Muslim community in the south Indian state of Kerala is a result of the travels of Muslim Indian Ocean traders, intermarriages, and conversions from local populations. Among their artistic contributions is an extensive song literature known as *māppiḷa pāṭṭū* (literally, Mappila song). *Māppiḷa pāṭṭū* uses a linguistic mix of Arabic and Malayalam (known as Arabi-Malayalam) and integrates a variety of literary themes and structures. For example, the many sub-genres of songs, usually loosely organized by topic or form, include sweeping ballads or story songs (*kissa pāṭṭū*), songs written in the form of a letter (*kattū pāṭṭū*), love or wedding songs (*kalyāṇa pāṭṭū*), songs sung during the religious festivals that often honor Sufi saints or the memory of *śahīds* (martyrs) who died in various battles known as *nērcas* (*nērcca pāṭṭū*), and devotional songs (*māla pāṭṭū*). The *māla*<sup>1</sup> songs are often about Sufi saints or other important Islamic figures or martyrs within the Islamic tradition. The earliest datable *māla pāṭṭū* is from 1607 CE, and modern *mālas* are still composed today (Karassery 2000). *Māla pāṭṭūs* (as well as other genres of *māppiḷa pāṭṭūs*) are rich sources of information about a community for which there are limited or scattered noncolonial sources.

This article examines and compares three Sufi devotional *māla pāṭṭūs*. Each song functions as a kind of hagiography, praising the power and knowledge of three different saintly figures: Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder of the Qadiri Sufi branch; Ahmad Kabir al-Rifa'i, the founder of the Rifa'i Sufi branch; and Sayyida Nafisa, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. These songs describe the figures, their histories, and their miraculous interventions in the lives of their devotees. In particular, this comparison offers insight into the religious diversity, multivocality, rivalries, and concerns within the Mappila community.

The first part of this article will briefly examine the general literary background and features of the *māla* songs. The second section will examine the *mālas* themselves, including their form, style, content, common thematic and linguistic patterns, areas of difference, and competition. The final section will discuss the songs' historical significance, the power and problematic nature of the saints with regard to "correct" Islamic belief and practice, and changes in the performative lives of the songs. These

changes in performance practices direct our attention toward intersections between religion, politics, and community identity as well as the process of “folklorization” that is changing the way the songs are currently being performed and preserved. Thus, these songs not only reflect historical circumstances and concerns but also help create (through their recitation, memorization, reproduction, and rejection) a variety of identities within the Mappila community. Though academic interest in *māppiḷa pāṭṭū* and *mālas* is increasing, there is limited scholarly work on them in English. Therefore, an introduction to some of the basic characteristics of *mālas* will be useful to get a sense of the genre before zeroing in on three particular examples.

### Literary background and general characteristics of *Māla Pāṭṭūs*

The *māla* tradition contains a variety of works, themes, and contexts, but for this discussion I wish to focus on the general characteristics of *mālas* praising Sufi saints.<sup>2</sup> The earliest extant (and datable) *māppiḷa pāṭṭū* is the 1607 *Muḥyiddīn Māla*,<sup>3</sup> written in praise of the Sufi Abdul Qadir Jilani. It is one of the poems discussed in detail in this article. In the song, the emotional tones echo that of the works of the sixteenth-century poet Tuñcattū Rāmānujan Eḷuttacchan, known in English as Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan. Ezhuthachan, considered among the greatest of Malayalam poets and “the father of modern Malayalam,” wrote intensely devotional poems, including retellings into Malayalam of the great Hindu epics such as the *Adyatma Rāmayaṇa*. It was in this literary milieu that the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* was composed, and a similar devotional tone is adopted in the song as well as in subsequent *mālas*, many of which tend to use the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* as a general template. The content of the Sufi *mālas* includes brief details of the saints’ birth, education, initiation, miracles or powers (*karāmāt*), enemies, and death. Usually some information about the creation of the song is given, such as the author’s name and/or the date of composition. These songs have a semiformal structure; they generally (but not always) tend to have one *īśal* (tune or rhythm) that continues throughout the entire song and briefly summarize incidents from the saints’ lives, often in a single couplet. This is different from other types of Mappila songs that may contain several tune changes and have long, elaborately described scenes.

*Māla pāṭṭūs’ īśals* were sometimes adopted from those of well-known songs (Piḷḷai 1998, 151). When new tunes were created, they were often adopted by other authors, resulting in a repertoire of *īśals* that could be drawn from to use for a new song.<sup>4</sup> The reproduction of *īśals* produces interesting resonances. For example, many *mālas* adopt the *īśal* of the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*, including M. N. Karassery’s modern secular song *Bashīr Māla*, written in praise of the famed Malayalam novelist Vaikom Muhammad Basheer; by using the *Muḥyiddīn Māla’s īśal*, Karassery’s song suggests that Basheer should be viewed as a literary “saint.” This may also be why other *mālas* often use the same basic structure and/or *īśal* of the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*: to musically associate similar numinous qualities with other saintly figures.<sup>5</sup>

*Mālas* tend to feature a fairly strict first- and last-letter repetition rhyming scheme, are replete with consonance and assonance, and are usually written in couplets. They begin with a traditional invocation to God, Muhammad, and his family and end with

a section called an *iravū*, or “begging,” that asks the Creator to have mercy on the composer and his many mistakes made in the work. Sometimes they also have a prayer (Arb. *du’a*) of the *ṭarīqat*, or Sufi branch, with which the figure is affiliated, appended to the end of the work.

### Performance practices, functions, and melodies

Although it is difficult to know how or in what context the *mālas* were initially performed, scholars note that they have customarily been sung in a variety of ritual contexts, such as festivals, religious gatherings, and as a part of domestic rites (Miller 1976, 243). For example, women may sing the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* without musical accompaniment after *maghrib* (sunset prayer) for the well-being of the household (Kunhali 2004, 21; Muneer 2016, 429–30). In addition to their role in ritual contexts, *mālas* were often used for educational purposes and formed part of the traditional education of much of the community until the 20th century. Students would memorize and recite the Quran and the *mālas* in their elementary religious schools, known as *madrasas*. An old marriage custom required the groom’s female relatives to question the bride about her education before the engagement; she was supposed to reply that she knew the Quran and the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* (Kunhali 2004, 100). This indicates the importance of the song for the household in general and women in particular, who were generally thought of, at least by the twentieth century, as the main consumer, and prime memorizer, of the *māla* songs (Kunhali 2004, 21).<sup>6</sup>

*Mālas* also served to put Sufi concepts such as *quṭb* (literally “axis,” referring to the Sufi spiritual leader of an age) and other technical vocabulary “into comprehensible forms” (Kunhali 2004, 91). Since it was considered meritorious to write, sing, copy, memorize, or hear *mālas*, their production and use in a variety of contexts was assured. In the next section, I look closely at some of the poetic elements and content of the three *mālas*: the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*, the *Rifa’ī Māla*, and the *Naḥḥī Māla*. I compare these for several reasons: first, these were among the few *māppīla pāṭṭūs* that were available as individually printed, modern, color booklets at bookstalls in and around Calicut, Kerala when I was there in 2010 and again in 2011–12. Second, several contacts recommended them to me as important songs in the genre. Third, they are about different Sufi saints, are from different time periods, and elucidate different community concerns.

### The songs

#### *Māla 1: Muḥyiddīn Māla*

The *Muḥyiddīn Māla* was written by a *qāḍi* (judge) named Muhammad Abdul Aziz in 1607 CE. Qāḍi Muhammad was a local judge and Islamic scholar who was born in Chaliyam near Calicut in Kerala and received his education under Abdul Aziz Makhḍum in the town of Ponnani, known as the Mecca of Kerala. The *Muḥyiddīn Māla* is his only composition in Arabi-Malayalam, but he wrote many pieces in Arabic, including the poem *Al Fathul-Mubin*, written between 1579 and 1607 CE. *Al Fathul-Mubin*

describes a battle between the Hindu ruler of Calicut, called the Zamorin, and the Portuguese over a Portuguese factory that was built on the Beypur river at Chaliyam. The Mappila community supported the Zamorin (in fact, the poem is dedicated to him) and describes the unity of the Muslims and *nāyars* (a group of traditionally martial castes) against the Portuguese at this time (Kurup 2006, 76).

The *Muhyiddīn Māla*, however, is a completely different kind of composition.<sup>7</sup> The *māla* is a hagiographical account of the life of the aforementioned *shaykh* named Abdul Qadir Jilani, founder of the Qadiri order of Sufis, who also goes by the title *muhyiddīn* (reviver of the faith). Jilani was born in 1077 CE in the area of Jilan in Persia (modern-day Iran), received his spiritual training in Baghdad, started proselytizing in 1131 CE, and died in 1165 CE; his family heritage extended paternally to Hassan, the elder grandson of Muhammad, and maternally to Husain, the younger grandson—thus traditionally branching from both lines back to the Prophet himself. Jilani was a philosopher, scholar, and an author of both poetry and prose, such as the prose discourses of the book *Futūh al-Ghayb* (Revelations of the Unseen) (Taramēl and Vallikkunnū 2006, 28; Malik 2018, 4–7).

The author of the text gives his sources for the details of Jilani’s life at the beginning of the work, which include the Arabic hagiography *Bahjat al-Asrār* (*The Splendor of the Mysteries*, a biography of Jilani) and a section from the aforementioned *Futūh al-Ghayb*. He describes the exalted status of the so-called “saint of Baghdad,” his fame, and his immense knowledge:

By the grace of the Possessor of the World, the One<sup>8</sup>  
 He [Jilani] was born into the family of Muhammad  
 He was born into the greatest of all families  
 He was famous everywhere  
 He came from his father as a leader  
 His fame fills all seven skies  
 He saw the seven skies simultaneously  
 He holds a kingly position among the angels  
 He has the sea of *sharīʿa*<sup>9</sup> on (his) right  
 The sea of *ḥaqīqa*<sup>10</sup> on (his) left  
 Above the sky and below the earth  
 His fame spreads like a flag

Jilani’s exalted position as the highest of all the Sufi saints is emphasized as other *shaykhs*, angels, and even the holy *qāf* mountain acknowledge his preeminence:

“Due to God’s blessing, my leg  
 Stands on the shoulders of all the *shaykhs*,” he said<sup>11</sup>  
 At that time, the Angels said “truth”  
 The created ones covered their heads  
 Then all the *shaykhs* on earth  
 Gave low bows

Qāf<sup>2</sup> and the encircling sea<sup>13</sup>  
 And the land of Gog<sup>14</sup> bowed their heads

Jilani's life is surrounded with various stories of his mystical powers and prowess. Annemarie Schimmel writes that he was "probably the most popular saint in the Islamic world, whose name is surrounded by innumerable legends that scarcely fit the image of the stern, sober representative of contrition and mystical fear" (1975, 247). These legends likely contributed to the popularity of his stories and his *māla* in Kerala as well as elsewhere in the Islamic world. Many of these tales are alluded to in the work. For example, one couplet refers to the story of how Jilani came to be known as "*muḥyiddīn*." One day, Jilani aided a beggar on the road. After caring for him, the man revealed himself as the Islamic religion itself and gave him the title of *muḥyiddīn* (or *muḥyī ud-dīn*), "reviver of religion" (Schimmel 1975, 247). In the song, this is alluded to in one couplet:

By the order of the One, the Owner, the Root  
*Muḥyiddīn* is his name, called by *dīn* himself!<sup>15</sup>

Another couplet refers to Jilani's truthfulness: before he left his childhood home his mother sewed forty gold pieces into his robe under his arm and admonished him to always tell the truth. Shortly thereafter he was captured by a band of thieves who did not find the hidden coins when they searched. One asked him if he had any money, and he responded, "Yes, under my armpits." The thief laughed, thinking it was a joke, and walked away. The same thing happened again, until finally, the leader came. He, however, took Jilani at his word and tore open his robe, finding the gold. Astounded, the leader asked him why he told them about the gold at all. The saint said: "I promised my mother I would always tell the truth." Hearing this, the leader broke into tears and all the thieves repented and changed their ways. The *Muḥyiddīn Māla* refers to this story with the following couplet:

When his mother told him, "Don't tell a lie!"  
 He gave his gold to a thief.

In addition to his virtues, the song refers to stories of Jilani's *karāmāt*: in one story the *shaykh* revives a chicken from its bones; it then runs around praising Allah, Muhammad, and Jilani himself (al-Jilānī 1992, xxxvii). The couplet summarizes this as follows:

When he told the bone of a chicken, "Cluck!"  
 It immediately clucked and flew.

Other couplets speak of a variety of supernatural powers. For example:

When they put before him a wrapped parcel  
 He knew what it was, before untying a knot  
 The impaired child, he restored  
 The unimpaired child, he impaired  
 He is one who put life into dead bodies  
 He made a dying elephant well

When walking in the deep darkness of night  
As he walked he used his finger as a palm-leaf candle.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the mentioned physical powers and abilities, he is able to aid his followers spiritually. The song proclaims that he will be able to save his disciples from hell, help them on the Day of Judgment, and aid them from afar in times of adversity:

Your children, in the circle of (my) eyesight  
They will go to heaven, this Allah promised [lit., gave him]  
During the day of killing and destruction  
I will catch them in my hand

God himself has promised to take care of the disciples of Muhyiddin, holding them in his hand and bringing them to heaven. Further, Muhyiddin promises to never abandon his followers in their times of need:

During times of adversity, if they take hold of me  
I will always take hold of them, he says  
Those who take hold of me should not fear anything  
I am their security, he says

The song assures followers or potential followers that his goodness is enough to help those who follow him, even if they are not perfect, and that he is available to them for any problem or condition that they may have:

All children are like their very own *shaykh*  
All my children are like me, he says  
If my children are not good  
I am always good, he says  
If you ever, in any way, pray to God  
Pray to God through me, he says  
Those that call me for any problem  
I will answer without hesitation, he says

In addition to its basic content, the *māla* uses poetic and grammatical forms that are subsequently mimicked in later *mālas*. It has local, vernacular conventions that were common at the time, such as abbreviated prepositions and rhetorical flourishes such as long /i/ sounds that have no meaning. Influences from at least two other languages are evident in the poem, including a variety of Old Tamil vocabulary and Sanskrit, similar to other Malayalam works of this time period. The only feature that might render this work difficult to understand by a non-Muslim of this time would be the Arabic/Islamic vocabulary, often specific words without adequate counterparts in Malayalam; for example, *ḥaqīqa* (supreme truth or absolute reality), *sharīʿa* (Islamic law and moral code), and *ʿarsh* (throne of God). Other times, it is clear that particular words are used for poetic effect, such as assonance, consonance, or rhyme.<sup>17</sup> For example, God is referred to as Allah (Arabic), *ēkal* (Malayalam, literally “the one”), *nāyan* (Malayalam, literally “leader”), and *avan* (Tamil/old Malayalam, literally “he”). Qādi Muhammad also uses grammar creatively. For example, *awliyāʿ*, the correct

plural form of the Arabic word *wali*, meaning “friend (of God),” is used in one line, while in another the singular form of *wali* is given the Malayalam plural ending to create the Arabi-Malayalam hybrid “*walikaḷ*.”

The *māla* has a structure in which many couplets end with the termination “*avar/ōvar*.” This final termination is used to make a verbal noun such as “he who listens,” “he who saw,” “he who said,” and so on. This allows for a consistent structure and rhythmic pattern that also continually emphasizes the subject of the song. In addition to end-letter repetition, the song also uses first-letter repetition and alliteration consistently. One can see, for example, such repetitions in the following couplet:

*kuṛavulla paitale nannākkayum ceytū*  
*kuṛavillāpaitale kuṛavākki viṭṭōvar*

For first-letter repetition, occurring at the beginning of each line, the consonant /k/ is repeated, and patterns of alliteration occur in the use of /ll/, /ll/, /k/, and /kk/ sounds. The final word, *viṭṭovar*, uses the *ovar* termination that is repeated consistently throughout the song. In this way Mappila poets used structure and vocabulary creatively in their compositions for poetic effect and emphasis.

The main portion of the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* ends with the date of composition and the metaphor of “stringing” the *māla*:

In the 782nd year of the Kollam era [1607]  
I prepared this *māla* in 155 lines  
Like pearls and rubies strung together  
I tied this garland, Oh people! (Kunhali 2004, 27)<sup>18</sup>

Many authors play with the Malayalam meaning of the word *māla* as “garland,” as Qadi Muhammad does here. The use of the word as a metaphor for couplets that are strung together like flowers or precious stones into a necklace is particularly beautiful and has a long literary history. Further, in this metaphor whoever “wears” it—recites or sings the poem—will receive merit.

The *māla*, as well as the figure of Jilani, has been very influential within the northern Kerala Muslim community and so popular that different authors have used the same name, *īśal*, and subject matter for their own compositions (Miller 1976, 289). Subsequent *mālas* adopt the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*’s poetic elements, content, and *īśal*, including modern songs, such as the aforementioned *Bashīr Māla*. The *Rifā’ī Māla*, discussed next, adopts many of the same literary conventions used in the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* but is slightly different in key ways.

#### *Māla 2: Rifā’ī Māla*

Similar to the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*, the *Rifā’ī Māla* is a devotional and hagiographical composition written by an anonymous composer in 1782 CE. The song praises Ahmad Kabir al-Rifa’i, the founder of the Rifa’i order. He was born in 1182 CE in what is now Iraq (Trimingham 1998, 37). Unsurprisingly, the language and the verses resemble those of the *Muḥyiddīn Māla*, and the claims made of Rifa’i are similar to the ones made of Jilani. Rifa’i is identified as an exceptional member of the Prophet Muhammad’s family, the “family of Hashim”:



By the grace of God, The Only One, The Owner of Love  
 He was born into the family of Hashim  
 From sunrise to sunset he is the most excellent  
 He shows the Prophet in a beautiful light

Like the figure of Muhyiddin, Rifa'i is descended from Muhammad and is a credit to him. The song also tells us that his specialness was marked even by his short time in the womb:

He was born from a pregnant stomach in 6 months  
 The virtuous mother asked, "Who is it?"  
 "Is it a son or a daughter?" she asked at that time  
 They answered, "An honorable son, Aḥmadul Kabir"  
 God called to him, "O Kabir!"  
 People will call (on) him happily

The song also notes that God himself spoke to Rifa'i, thus reiterating his resemblance to the Prophet, his exceptionality, and his knowledge. His spiritual knowledge is also his aid in understanding the physical world, and are both remarked upon in the song:

Without my notice, a blade of grass in this world  
 Cannot (become) green, he says  
 The secret of /ḥa/ and the secret of /mīm/ (letters of the Arabic alphabet)  
 I am fated to know, he says

The mention of *ḥa* and *mīm* invokes the forty-first verse of the Quran, also known as *Sūrat Fuṣṣilat*. It is first of the four chapters that require the prostration of believers and powerfully relays God's omnipotence, the Quran's power, and the idea of accountability on the Day of Resurrection. The two letters are also central in the spelling of the name of Muhammad, supporting the *mīm* and the *dāl* that begins and ends his name. In this couplet, all of these resonances—omnipotence, power, the ability to aid a person during the last days, and a foundation for Muhammad himself—are invoked and subtly linked to the figure of Rifa'i.<sup>19</sup>

Further, "*ḥa*" and "*mīm*" refer to a combination of letters included in the category called the *muqatta'āt*, which includes letters that are written before certain verses of the Quran. Because the meaning is unclear, these letters are seen as divine secrets known only to God or, as in this case, spiritually evolved figures. This kind of esoteric, mystical knowledge is a common characteristic of Sufi saints but, when compared to the *Muhyiddīn Māla*, is indicated by more technical Arabic/Sufi terms throughout the text of the *Rifā'ī Māla*. For example, one couplet uses the term *yaqīn* three times:

"At the knowledge of certitude and at the vision of certitude  
 And at the real certitude am I," he says<sup>20</sup>

*Yaqīn* means "certainty" or "certitude" and is the pinnacle of the various *maqāms* (stations) by which the path of *walāya* or sainthood is fulfilled. Schimmel notes, "The station of sincere '*ilm al-yaqīn* leads further to '*ayn al-yaqīn*, 'vision of certitude' or

‘essence of certainty’—the station of the Gnostics—until it is consummated in *haqq al-yakīn*, the ‘real certitude’ or ‘reality of certainty,’ which is the place of God’s friends” (1975, 141). The *Muhyiddīn Māla*, by contrast, positions Jilani in the same way, using different vocabulary. For example:

“*Jinns* and *ins* and angels  
I am the *shaykh* above all of these,” he said  
“All the *walis* and *quṭbs*  
They are children in my house,” he said

This verse places Jilani above everything and everyone: *jinns*, people, angels, *walis*, and *quṭbs*.<sup>21</sup> It does not, however, use more technical Sufi vocabulary. Because the *Rifā’ī Māla* uses many such terms, the overall content of the song feels thematically more esoteric or religiously sophisticated than the earlier *Muhyiddīn Māla*. The abundance of technical terms in the *Rifā’ī Māla*, compared to the *Muhyiddīn Māla*, could be due to a combination of factors. Written 176 years after the *Muhyiddīn Māla*, it is possible that Sufism was much more widespread by this time, and thus there were more people who understood the vocabulary. Alternatively, the *Rifā’ī* was perhaps written with a much more specific audience in mind than the relatively less technical *Muhyiddīn Māla*.

Possibly one of the functions of the later *māla* was to woo followers from the Qadiriyya to the Rifa’iyya, or at least assert the superiority of Rifa’i over Jilani. The song (as well as excerpts from the *Muhyiddīn Māla*) suggests that there may have been competition between various Sufi orders at this time. The *Rifā’ī Māla* not only contains numerous statements that extol the greatness of Rifa’i and his lineage, but it also flatly states that anyone outside of the order will be destroyed. The poem proclaims, after a long section of couplets describing Rifa’i and his powers and relationship with God,

All the people who do not follow my *ṭariqat* (branch)  
They will be utterly destroyed<sup>22</sup>

Further, some of the content of the *Rifā’ī Māla* suggests that the two orders were competing directly for followers. Consider the following excerpt:

“Khāja (Khoja) Muhyiddīn’s *murīds* (disciples)  
Boarded a ship and went,” he said  
When the water ran out, the world’s people said,  
“Pray to Kabir for water”  
When they all prayed for water  
He turned salt water into fresh water

When Jilani’s followers needed fresh water while at sea, they prayed to Rifa’i (Kabir), rather than Muhyiddin, and received it. Further, the song says that his progeny will survive and be protected, while those of other *walis* will not:

“The descendants of the *walis* will be cut down  
My descendant will not be cut down,” he says

Clearly, the song is arguing for the effectiveness and power inherent in Rifa'i and those who follow him. It is not unusual for a Sufi song to claim the ultimate greatness of the saint about which it is composed. Interestingly, it also appears to be positioning the order against other competing orders that may have been proselytizing or seeking patronage from the same population. This is something not unheard of in the area. V. Kunhali also interprets lines from the *Muhyiddin Māla* as indicating competition between Sufi orders in Kerala at that time; he also notes that competition between Sufi groups continues throughout the twentieth century (2004, 15, 66–67).

The *Rifā'i Māla*'s poetics are similar to the *Muhyiddin Māla*'s: most couplets end with *aver*, thus emphasizing the subject of the song while also providing a repetitive structure and rhythmic pattern. First- and last-letter repetition are used fairly consistently, and alliteration and assonance are used whenever possible. Similarly echoing the *Muhyiddin Māla* is the inclusion of the date of composition toward the end of the song:

In 957 kollam era  
I stitched this *qiṣṣa* in 158 verses

As I stitched I mixed pearls and diamonds  
I stitched this excellent *māla*, oh people!

Stylistically, the *Rifā'i Māla* draws heavily from the *Muhyiddin Māla*, echoing the earlier work in rhyming patterns and other poetic elements as well as content and the location of information within the song. This suggests that the *Muhyiddin Māla* remained significant enough that other orders borrowed some of its popularity and numinous sheen by mimicking elements in their own songs, even as they competed for followers. The *Rifā'i Māla*'s more forceful argument for the Rifā'i order above all others and the presence of more technical vocabulary, intelligible to those already familiar with Sufism, suggests that the people who were the intended audience for the song likely already had a familiarity with Sufism. Thus, the *Rifā'i Māla* reflects a community with an established Sufi presence. The *Nafīsat Māla*, however, is slightly different from the earlier works, possibly due to the history of the figure herself. It also may simply reflect a disparate set of community needs.

### *Māla 3: Nafīsat Māla*

The *Nafīsat Māla* is written about Sayyida Nafisa (also known as *Nafīsa Bīvi*), the great-granddaughter of Hassan, one of the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad that was previously mentioned (Schimmel 2003, 32). She was born near Mecca, but as an adult moved to Cairo with her husband, where she lived for the rest of her life, teaching students and performing miracles. Upon her death in 824 CE, a mausoleum was built in her honor that remains a popular pilgrimage spot. During the Middle Ages, the sultans themselves would throw grand celebrations in the Citadel of Cairo for her birthday (Schimmel 2003, 32).

The song and Nafisa's attributes are similar in many respects to those of both Jilani and Rifa'i. She is a member of the Prophet Muhammad's family through Fatima (a characteristic of most Sufi saints), with special knowledge and powers; according to one Egyptian author, Nafisa is the highest model of female piety (Hoffman 2000, 117,

124). This piousness and attention to correct behavior is spelled out clearly in the *Nafīsat Māla*:

Many of the Sustainer's orders, like the 5 pillars,  
She followed correctly, continuously, and daily

It notes other devout behavior:

During the daytime she fasted completely  
At night, without sleep, she was always praying

It also establishes her as a properly married woman, with an (almost) equally gifted husband:

And her husband, who performed the *ḥajj* 20 times, had great virtue  
[He] received the greatest status among the lineage of the prophet

When she moved to Egypt with her husband, the people of Egypt recognized her high status and sanctity and grew to love her very much (Hoffman 2000, 130, 138):

To all the people of Egypt, the most grace and blessing  
God gave through this *bīvi* (lady of rank)

As with other Sufi figures, her *karāmāt* is of particular interest in the song. A variety of miracles are ascribed to her, such as curing the paralysis of a small girl. This is described in the following section:

To all the people of Egypt, the highest grace and blessing  
God gave through this *bīvi*

In that way: the body of a Jewish daughter  
Was completely limp; her strength was gone

Her relatives sprinkled the resident *bīvi*'s bathing water on her  
When it touched her, her illness disappeared

Like that, the great pain left; full health was restored  
She compassionately gave comfort to the whole family

Perfectly with their tongue they said *shahāda*<sup>23</sup>  
They became certain, and with their hearts believed [in] Islam

Not only does merely sprinkling the bathing water of Nafisa heal the girl, but also the proof of her power causes the entire family to convert to Islam. According to the song, healing is something that Nafisa does quite often for her followers. For example, the author Nalakattu Kunni Moydin writes the song after Nafisa healed his son of a terrible fever that caused swelling in his mouth. He also describes other instances of Nafisa intervening in health crises, including healing oxen after the owner tied coins to their horns as an offering to her. In Kerala, her *māla* is sung in order to give women an easy childbirth, and although this is a characteristic attributed to several *mālas*, in the *Nafīsat Māla* her ability to help women in childbirth is explicitly mentioned several times, and especially recommended for women who have long, painful, or complicated labors.

Other miracles are described as well, such as how Nafisa helped a poor widow with four daughters who lost thread that they spent eight days spinning:

Listen further to the subject of *bīvi*'s greatness!  
 An old mother with children was heavy inside  
 In sadness she cried and beat her hand on her chest  
 With confusion and sadness in front of *bīvi*  
 She came [to Nafisa], in dire straits, and said, "I have four  
 Unmarried daughters, we are orphaned  
 We spin thread day and night in order to survive  
 Like that, for eight days we spun thread together  
 Then I took and tied them and put them on my head  
 Humming I walked to the nearby market  
 After entering and quickly selling it, with the price that I would get  
 I could divide into two shares exactly  
 Half was for food and with the other half  
 I decided to buy cotton  
 When I was walking a bird snatched the bundle of thread  
 From my head and left, O my pearl!"

The story continues that there was a group of people on a boat that suddenly got a leak and began to fill with water. They cried out to *bīvi* for help, and, at that moment, a bird flew overhead with the bunch of thread. The people used the thread to plug the hole and it saved them and the boat. When they returned, they went straight to Nafisa and gave her five hundred pieces of silver, which she passed on to the impoverished widow. Thus, Nafisa is also blessed with the power to save people from dire circumstances, which she uses to directly work in the lives of her followers. Other stories similarly tell moving stories of aid that she gave to people, often resulting in their conversion.

Nafisa is credited with substantial scholarship and keen intelligence. Called the "gem of knowledge," she studied with Imam Shaf'i, the founder of one of the four orthodox schools of Islamic law (Schimmel 2003, 32; Hoffman 2000, 124). He even asks for her intercession when his health declines and, when he is on his deathbed, requests that she perform his funeral prayers (Hoffman 2000, 133). Details such as these that document her scholarly accomplishments are recorded in the song alongside her many miraculous works.

Toward the end of the poem are two couplets that echo the earlier *mālas*:

Know that this *māla* will attract the highest virtues  
 Because of (her) greatness, sing (her) praises with respect<sup>24</sup>  
 If I, Nalakatthu Kunni Moydin, have faults  
 And afflictions, please pardon me, and give me into her custody, O Allah

Nalakatthu Kunni Moydin composed the *Nafīsat Māla* sometime from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Beyond the year of his death in 1917 CE, not much is known about the author, including the exact date of the song's composition

(Muhammadāli 2007, 40). The song follows in the same style of earlier *mālas*; however, it uses poetic features such as end rhymes that emphasize the subject of the sentence, first- and last-letter rhyming patterns and alliteration, and it is composed in a single tune throughout. As in the previous songs, her authority and power are emphasized, and she too is called a *quṭb*, a title reserved for the highest Sufi figure in an age, someone who has a direct connection to God:

To aid in discernment [she] received the position of *quṭb*  
 She grew in insight and glory, and the presence of God increased

The *Nafīsat Māla* diverges in some aspects from the other *mālas*. There is very little comparison to other saintly figures; instead, descriptions of specific miracles (and particularly healings) are given in detail along with attestations to her piety and scholarly knowledge. I posit that this is mainly due to there being no particular Sufi branch associated with Nafisa and therefore no direct competition. It is tempting to read a gendered element here, in which men are accorded power as a primary characteristic while women's piety is emphasized. However, in addition to her pious behavior (praying, fasting, remembering God—all behaviors followed by male saints also), Nafisa has considerable spiritual power and scholarly knowledge. Her interactions with Imam Shaf'i point to these clearly. Further, as Jennifer Heath notes concerning the status of women in Sufism, "Women were among the very first in Islam to emerge as ascetics, saints, and mystics, and it is here, more than any other context, that they have participated and received acknowledgement on an equal basis with men" (2004, 151). Ultimately, it is unclear if the differences between the songs are due to the existence of Sufi orders tied to Jilani and Rifa'i but not Nafisa, or to some other element that I neglect in this article. The song closely follows well-known Egyptian stories (Hoffman 2000) about Nafisa, rewritten to conform to *māla pāṭṭū* genre, although emphasizing healing above all else. As mentioned earlier, the *māla* ends with a short list of several instances in which Nafisa resolved health issues when petitioned, including that of the author's son. Ending the main portion of the song with these examples emphasizes Nafisa's role as healer. It also indicates the concern with help, especially the healing that made Nafisa so popular. I will return to this theme in the following section, which provides a broader discussion of inter-community differences, concerns, and changes in the performative contexts of the *mālas* today.

### **Saints' power, contestation, and transformation**

As the songs analyzed in the previous section indicate, Islam and Sufism in Kerala have never been monolithic institutions; there have been multiple Sufi leaders, orders, and groups in Kerala as well as differences and debates between Muslim leaders and groups. Competition between Muslim religious orders certainly took place in South Asia (for example, see Green 2004, 222, 232–35) generally and in Kerala more specifically. For instance, Sebastian Prange examines Zayn al-Din al-Malibari's *Faṭḥ al-mu'īn*, a sixteenth-century Arabic commentary on Islamic law written in Malabar, and finds that it warns readers of the dangers of seeking mystical insight without proper training. This implies that there were people in the area doing exactly

that and that there was competition between Muslim authorities in the area (Prange 2019, 248–51). Kunhali also notes the likelihood of early disputes among followers, based on his examination of the *Muhyiddin Māla*. My analysis supports both his and Prange’s suppositions. Further, there is considerable evidence of later disputes between Muslim contingents in the region (Kunhali 2004, 13, 15, 66–68). For instance, in the nineteenth-century disputes known as the Kondotty-Ponnani *kaitarkkam* (factional controversy) the accusations and debates that occurred between the two groups appear quite serious. Religious scholars associated with Ponnani issued *fatwas* (legal opinions) against the Kondotty group, condemning them as infidels and apostates, and forbade their community from interacting with the Kondotty group. For example, the Ponnani scholars banned their people from entering the Kondotty mosques, being buried in their graveyards, eating the animals they butchered, and intermarrying with members of the Kondotty faction (Randathani 2007, 49, 53–60).

The so-called Mappila Rebellion of 1921 also had an effect on the identity of the community, both from within and without. An unsuccessful uprising against the British government by pockets of Mappila peasants, who were non-landowning agricultural workers, left the Mappila community in turmoil. Thousands of Mappilas had been killed, and scores more were either executed, imprisoned (either temporarily or for life), or deported. Further, the uprising left food scarce, internal infrastructures destroyed, and agriculture interrupted (Miller 1976, 148–50). There were also repercussions concerning the identity of the Mappila community, including the very public characterization of them as uneducated and uncivilized. The establishment of the British Malabar Special Police, which was organized in order to prevent further uprisings, emphasized this stereotype (Miller 1976, 146, 152–53). Words such as “shameful” or “ignorant” were often used when describing the community.<sup>25</sup> Mahatma Gandhi himself described the Mappila community as “cruel” and as having gone “mad” (Devji 2005, 73). Islamic reformers in Kerala wrestled with community issues that they saw as both inappropriate and hindering the progress of the Muslim community (Miller 2015, 37–41; Menon 2018, 264–66). Like reform movements in other parts of India, so-called “folk” superstitions and practices, lack of modern education, and the corruption of local Islamic religious leaders were pinpointed. This led to theological, educational, and political reform movements in Kerala (Miller 2015, 93–126, *passim*). Such reform movements continue today with diverse opinions concerning correct theological positions and ritual practices.

One example of the ongoing tension that exists there is the status of the Sufi saints and the *mālas* that praise them. Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella relate that during one of their research trips they found that various offerings to saints were seen as traditional Sunni practices that tended to be juxtaposed against modern, reformist tendencies (2008, 323). “Sunni” in the Kerala context refers to those who follow local, traditional Islamic practices, often contrasted with the progressive *mujāhidīns* (spiritual warriors), now associated with an organization called the Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (KNM). Concerning this dynamic, the Osellas note that, “Kerala reformism follows another of the commonly recognized patterns: an urban, educated middle class waving the stick of reformism at rural, lower-class Muslims who stand



accused of straying from the path of ‘true Islam’” (2008, 323). They include a quote from a KNM member that is worth reading in full:

Islam has been polluted by false knowledge. People are kept in ignorance and superstition so that priests [Sunni clergy] can fill their bellies and keep control, justifying their existence. You can read in Logan’s book [Malabar Manual] about the pitiful condition of Muslims in 19th century Kerala. People were not allowed even to learn Malayalam script—it was considered *haram*. Ignorance leads to superstition and other un-Islamic practices. When in crisis, people call the name of Sheikh Moihudeen. You may have heard of the Moihudeen *mala* in his honour. Women especially read the *mala*, and they believe they will get merit from doing so. He might have been a great man, but this is *shirk*. People praying to saints, prostrating in front of their *jarams* [tombs] is forbidden. The Prophet himself did not want to have a grave! People go to shrines asking saints for help or miracles, but only God can help.

In some quarters, then, petitioning saints is associated with “ignorance, superstition, and uncouthness” (ibid., 338). This is reinforced not only by Kerala reform movements but by a migrant labor force (especially Muslim workers) that travels to the Gulf for work and brings back not just money but ideas about what “real” Islam looks, or should look, like.<sup>26</sup>

The crux of the issue is the petitioning of saints, seen by some as *shirk*, or the worship of anyone or anything aside from God. Saints have long been an important and powerful part of the Muslim world in Kerala, and although Muḥyiddin, Rifa’i, and Nafisa were popular Sufi figures, they were far from alone. Muslim saints performed functions similar to that of other South Asian holy figures, and Mappilas have called both Muslim and non-Muslim saints *awlīyā’*, which, as noted, is the Arabic plural form of *wali*, a friend of God. Prange notes the elision of “categorical difference” between Muslim and non-Muslim figures in popular piety (Prange 2019, 243) that occur as distinctions become unimportant in the face of urgent requirements. When disaster strikes, practicality overrides theology, and the important requirement then becomes the ability to help.

Traditionally, the saints were believed to command *jinns*, entities who would fight for the saint or help them to perform a variety of miracles, including healing (Kunhali 2004, 110; Karassery 2001, 44). In *Mudpacks and Prozac*, Murphy Halliburton describes some of the healing therapies used today at the mosque/shrine complex named Beemapalli that is located in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, where a Muslim holy woman named Syedu Shuhada Maheen Abubacker—popularly known as *ammā* (mother)—and her son are interred. People of all traditions come for treatment, including praying, eating jasmine flowers, and drinking the water (said to have healing properties) that comes from an underground spring on the property, especially during the female saint’s annual ‘*urs*, or death anniversary (Halliburton 2009, 78–79).<sup>27</sup> Many saints offered practical help for urgent circumstances such as healing, protection, and miraculous intervention in the past but also continue to do so in the present. I speculate that the *Nafīsat Māla* remained popular due to the song’s emphasis on healing, even though Nafisa claims no dedicated followers in the form of an independent order.



The *mālas* were seen as extensions of the saints' power and were believed to have protective functions by their very presence, and so people unable to read the script would keep copies in their homes for protection or auspicious effect, much like one would use an amulet. Reciting *mālas* was believed to benefit an entire household, including basic needs such as food, curing sickness, and filling wells (Kunhali 2004, 112; Muneer 2016, 429–30). Certain *mālas* were associated with particular benefits: the *Cherusiti Tannaḷ Māla*, for instance, was sung for forty-one days in order to allow a barren woman to conceive (Kunhali 2004, 113–14). Moreover, the *Rifā'i Māla* is sung as protection from burns and snakebites, which echoes ritual practices in the Rifa'i order, which is known for the austere corporeal practices of its members (Randathani 2007, 41; Taramēl and Vaḷḷikkunnū 2006, 25–27).<sup>28</sup> As noted, the *Nafīsat Māla* specifically details Nafisa's ability to heal and help women in childbirth multiple times in her song.

If the purchase of printed versions of the *mālas* is any indication, then the perceived numinous quality of them (for protection, good fortune, or healing) may be on the decline. Certainly the production of materials in Arabi-Malayalam script is slowing down, partially because with the rise of general education in Malayalam, the need for such materials for educational purposes has decreased (Miller 1976, 289–90). On the one hand, at the publishing house of C. H. Muhammad and Sons in Tirurangadi where I purchased a bundle of Mappila songs, many of them dry and brittle with age, I was told that they were going to stop producing the Arabi-Malayalam text because no one reads the script anymore. Many of the songs, such as the older *mālas*, are often impenetrable to those unfamiliar with Arabi-Malayalam's vocabulary, colloquialisms, and archaic grammatical forms. On the other hand, books of mixed collections containing both Arabic *mawḷids* and Arabi-Malayalam *mālas* printed in Arabi-Malayalam script are available at local bookstalls.

The *mālas* are still performed in certain venues, but newer Mappila songs are being written that are much more comprehensible to a modern Malayali audience, although connoisseurs and scholars lament the loss of technical skill, traditional forms, and deeper religious meaning (Neṭṭiyānāṭṭu 2009, 24).<sup>29</sup> This points us toward the most recent transformation that Mappila songs in general have undergone, a process of commodification for the purpose of mass consumption that scholars such as Frank J. Korom call "folklorization" (Korom 2006, 11). Some Mappila songs are immensely popular in other formats; radio stations play both modern film songs and classic songs, and new Mappila "pop" songs continue to be written and published in cheap booklets in Malayalam script. Compact discs of many kinds of songs (including the *mālas* discussed here) are also available in northern Kerala (although difficult to find in the south). Multiple televised singing competitions focused solely on Mappila songs have aired, such as the long-running show named Patturumal that is aired on Kairali TV. Hundreds of songs and performances can be found on YouTube.

However, efforts are being made in Kerala to preserve older materials, including the *mālas*, other Mappila songs, and prose Arabi-Malayalam texts, as the cultural heritage of the community under investigation here. The written or printed texts are preserved at cultural centers that have libraries and programs for the promotion and conservation of Mappila literature and arts. One example is the Mahakavi Moyinkutty

Vaidyar Smarakam, a government-funded cultural center established in Kondotty in 1999 to memorialize the great poet Moyinkutty Vaidyar (1852–92 CE), which houses a folklore study center, reference library, and museum. It hosts festivals and seminars and has published several books on Mappila songs. The library specializes in Arabi-Malayalam works, striving to collect and catalogue such texts that are gradually disappearing. In a fascinating turn, there are YouTube videos of the old *mālas* (including the ones on which I have focused here) that teach Arabi-Malayalam script alongside the *mālas* to people by presenting the Arabi-Malayalam script on the screen and highlighting each word as it is sung. Folklorization, then, may be a process that in the end contributes to the preservation of the traditional usages of the songs, contested or not, since it provides access to them for a larger audience via the internet. This is reminiscent of Valdimar Tr. Hafstein’s remarks concerning “heritagization” and “folklorization.” Hafstein writes “the current heritagization of social practices is the latest phase in the long term infusion of folkloristic perspectives, knowledge, and concepts into the public sphere as part of society’s reflexive modernization” (2019, 128). Not only a logical modern development, folklorization (sometimes seen as a problematic issue) can go hand-in-hand with the safeguarding of intangible heritage (Hafstein 2019, 143).

In conclusion, a close reading of these three *māla pāṭṭūs* points our attention to and provides rich historical details about possible shifts and complexities within the Mappila community of Kerala, from voices within the community. Moreover, the songs point out the diverse viewpoints that coexisted (and still coexist) within the Kerala Muslim population, and thus reflect the diversity, flexibility, and contestations that exist within religious communities in general. Although the *māla pāṭṭūs* may inhabit an ambivalent cultural space, this study suggests that this ambivalence is nothing new. Although their numinous qualities may be, generally speaking, deemphasized as their cultural value becomes foregrounded in cultural centers, cultural performances, and the commercialization of newer Mappila pop songs, the process of folklorization is also making the traditional *mālas* available to a larger audience than ever before and thus not only preserving the songs but also reflecting and possibly (re)constructing and revitalizing Mappila identities and practices.<sup>30</sup>

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AUTHOR

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## NOTES

1. The most obvious etymology of the word *māla* is from the Malayalam/Sanskrit meaning of “garland,” which many authors play on in their poems (e.g., “stringing the garland”). However, some scholars contest this etymology. For example, Bālakṛṣṇan Vaḷḷikkunnū and Umar Taramēl, well-known Mappila song scholars, write that in the Mappila context, *māla* is derived from the Arabic word *mawlid*, which refers to the birthday celebration of Muhammad and other saintly figures. Although they maintain that it has a different etymology, they do not deny a literary connection to other Malayalam literary works such as the tenth-century *Mukunda Māla* or the Niraṇam poets’ *Bharata Māla* of the fourteenth century (see Taramēl and Vaḷḷikkunnū 2006, 25). Hussain Randathani considers *mālas* to be “Sufi devotional songs.” The *mālas* do (mostly) contain the same information as *mawliids*—birth-related miracles, general miracles, biographical information, and so on—but they are distinct in structure, language, and function (see Randathani 2007, 40). It is interesting that the origin of the word is debated.
2. For example, the *Kottupallī Māla* describes a young man named Kunni Marakkar who leaves his own wedding in order to rescue a Muslim girl from Portuguese abductors. He dies in the attempt, and his body is cut into seven pieces and thrown into the sea; miracles take place at the sites where his limbs wash ashore (Dale 1980, 49). Other *mālas* focus their devotion on important figures in the Islamic historical tradition, such as the *Fatima Bīvi Māla*, the *Siddiq Māla* (in praise of the first Caliph, Abubakar Siddiq), and the *Maḥamud Māla* in praise of the Prophet.
3. *Muḥyiddīn Māla* is the Arabi-Malayalam script version of the song’s transliterated spelling; the Malayalam script version spells it *Muḥiyiddīn Māla*.
4. The *Muḥyiddīn Māla*, *Rifā’ī Māla*, and *Nafīsat Māla* all traditionally have different tunes, but the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* and the *Rifā’ī Māla* are similar enough in rhythm that they can easily be sung to the same tune.
5. Not all *mālas* follow this format. For example, Moyinkuṭṭi Vaidyar’s *Kiḷatti Māla* differs in several ways from these *mālas*. Vaidyar is widely considered the “great poet” of Arabi-Malayalam literature; he even has a memorial center named after him, to which I refer in this article’s conclusion.
6. Although the relationship between gender and the *māla* literature is not a focus of this article, I plan on exploring it in future research.
7. P. K. Yasser Arafath theorizes that the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* was the first literary work written in Arabi-Malayalam script. See Arafath (2020, 529).
8. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. I used both the Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam version for the *Muḥyiddīn Māla* and the *Rifā’ī Māla*. The *Nafīsat Māla* was translated solely from the Arabi-Malayalam version. These are all modern booklets, with no publication date; see the reference list for more publication information. When transliterating, I used the Malayalam version when available for ease of transliteration, as there is no standard system of transliteration for Arabi-Malayalam script. I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for helping with my translations, including Sara Jasmine Muhammad, M. N. Karaserry, and M. R. Unnithan.
9. Islamic law that deals with daily life.
10. Mystical knowledge; supreme truth or absolute reality.

11. That is, he is head and shoulders above all other Sufi leaders. This is a derivation of a famous line attributed to Jilani: “This foot of mine is on the neck of all the saints.” See Malik (2018, 15).
12. It refers to a remote, mystical mountain in the Islamic tradition.
13. It is known as *baḥr muḥīt*. In Arabic, it is written as *al-baḥr al-muḥīt*, but the articles have been deleted here, probably to preserve the *īśal*.
14. The Arabic term, *ya’jūj*, is written with the Malayalam word for land (*nāṭū*), so is the “land of Gog.” Gog and Magog, or *ya’jūj* and *ma’jūj*, are mentioned in both the Quran and the Bible. It is uncertain whether they are persons, groups, or lands, but it is clear that here it refers to a land. They are generally perceived negatively, as unbelievers or the lands of unbelievers. The full couplet reads as follows: *kāḥmalayinnum baḥarumuhittinum / yaujūj nāṭtinnun talane tātticcōvar*.
15. *mūlam uṭayavar ēkal aruḷāle / muhiyiddīn ennuṭēr dīntān vīliccōvar*.
16. Interestingly, Rabia of Basra is also credited with being able to make her fingertips glow at night (see Schimmel 2003, 35).
17. This is a practice continued in many Mappila songs. For example, the *Nafīsat Māla* uses both Arabic and Malayalam words for “death,” and it uses both Tamil and Malayalam verbs meaning “to speak.”
18. In order to calculate CE, add 825 years to the Kollam date. The two couplets are:

*kollam eḷunūṭi eṇṇatti raṇṭil nān / kōrttenimmālāne nūṭtanbattañcummal*  
and

*muttum māṇikyavum onnāyi kōrttapōl / muhiyaddīnmālēnekōrttēn nān lōkare*.

The “stringing” of the song as well as the mention of pearls and rubies strongly alludes to the literary language *maṇipravāḷam*, a word that translates to “rubies and coral,” which is a hybrid mixture of Sanskrit with Malayalam. The poet is suggesting his composition—a mixture of Malayalam and Arabic—is similarly literary.

19. Thanks to Akbar Hyder, who drew my attention to these allusions.
20. *ilmulyakkīnilum aṇinulyakkīnilum / hakkulyakkīnilum nānannū connovar*.
21. *Quṭb* literally means “axis” or “pole” but refers to a Sufi leader with a direct connection to God, who may or may not be known to people. There is believed to be only one per generation. It is sometimes translated as “pivot.”
22. *eṇṇe tvarīkhattil tuṭarātōrkkokkeyu / ēṭṭam musibattavarkennu connōvar*.
23. The statement that is used for conversion to Islam, considered to be one of the five pillars of faith: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.”
24. The word *adab* refers to the system of Muslim etiquette.
25. For example, “The most shameful of the symptoms of the failure of this alliance were the Moplah riots when an anti-imperialist agitation, originally inspired by the *Khilafat* movement, got out of control and its nature changed in the hands of ignorant mobs to a fratricidal and inhuman massacre of its own Hindu allies” (see Ahmad 1964, 268). Similarly, Murray Titus wrote in 1929 that the Mappilaas were “bigoted and ignorant as a class, and have given trouble from time to time by their fanatical outbursts, the last and most serious of all being in 1921, when they carried on a real rebellion. They endeavored to set up a Muslim kingdom, and perpetrated forced conversions among the Hindu community” (Titus 1990, 40).

26. Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella caution us against putting too much emphasis on Gulf influence on Islamic reform in Kerala, instead insisting that it be situated within the larger history of Kerala reform movements that stretch back to the middle of the nineteenth century (2008, 330–33). They also note that although there may be some continuities between the *mujāhids* and Gulf reform movements, the former are well aware of the differences between their practices and those of Wahhabi reformism, such as the use of Arabic in sermons (the *mujāhids* prefer the vernacular) and women’s access to mosques (which the *mujāhids* allow, but both Wahhabis and Kerala Sunnis generally do not) (ibid., 332).

27. Interestingly, there are no *māla* songs associated with Beemapalli; additionally, Muslims in the southern areas of the state are not identified as “Mappilas,” for they use family names instead (Kunhali 2004, 45).

28. It was reported as early as the eleventh century that Rifa’i followers “rode on lions,” ate live snakes, and walked on hot coals. Other practices of Rifa’i followers included piercing cheeks with sharpened iron skewers, which is practiced by some in the Muslim community in Kerala even today (Bosworth 2012). See also Trimmingham (1998, 38–39). For a description of similar practices in Gujarat, see Van der Veer (1992, 554).

29. I was also told by several people that most modern songs that go by the name of *māppiḷa pāṭṭū* are at best poor imitations and at worst not *māppiḷa pāṭṭūs* at all.

30. For a similar observation, but with regard to the way that reciting devotional texts such as the *Muhyiddīn Māla* forges a pious disposition, see Muneer (2016, 427, *passim*).

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