In 2011, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Mappila Rebellion the very idea to celebrate the rebellion was contested. It brought alive once again the sharp differences in the way the rebellion has been understood by different scholars. Regarding the nature of this rebellion, we have more than one view in which different scholars interpreted the rebellion in accordance with their ideological leaning. Marxists took the position that it was an agrarian movement and some opposed it by arguing that it was a religiously motivated movement among the Mappila Muslims of erstwhile British Malabar. This debate has been going on in the Indian academia for more than half a century now. However, in the recent debate which took place in Kerala in the backdrop of the ninetieth anniversary, particularly the issue of keeping the memories of the revolt was contested. To forget the Mappila Rebellion would be to disown a past that involved a strong subaltern movement that became a turning point in the history of colonial Malabar. This article comprehensively reviews the different aspects of Mappila rebellion through a historical sociology perspective.

Keywords: 1921, Mappila Rebellion, Moplah Rebellion, Malabar Rebellion, Historical Sociology, Kerala.
Introduction

Ninety-three years have passed since the historic Mappila Rebellion\(^1\) *(Malabar Kalaapam)* of 1921. It was after much repression by the British colonial government that the revolts among the Muslim (a group of Muslims who represented the earliest converts to Islam) tenants that had been happening continually from 1836 onwards in Malabar came to an end with the final revolt of 1921. It is also worth mentioning that this rebellion is popular among Keralites not as Mappila Rebellion but as Malabar Rebellion. During the British Raj in India, Malabar was one of the regional demarcations, which comprised mainly of four Revenue districts of contemporary Kerala namely Calicut, Malappuram, Kannur and Palakkad. Nevertheless, considering the familiarity of academic circles outside Kerala, I would be using the term Mappila Rebellion instead of Malabar Rebellion throughout this paper. Against the backdrop of its ninetieth anniversary in the year 2011, there was an academic debate\(^2\) in Kerala regarding the issue of keeping up the memories of this revolt. One group of intellectuals headed by Professor M. Gangadharan, an eminent historian in Kerala who has conducted studies on the Mappila Rebellion, argued that there is no point in celebrating the revolt because there was nothing productive in it (Gangadharan 2011:10). Those who support Professor Gangadharan raised five major issues in order to justify their claims:

1. There is nothing to be proud of in the Mappila Rebellion.
2. British colonial power was never threatened by the Rebellion and the government did not have any serious loss or damage as a result of it.
3. The Tenancy Reform Bill of the British government that was eagerly anticipated in the 1920s lagged because of the bloody rebellion. The absence of legal reforms allowed the landowners to evict their tenants at will.
4. The Mappila Rebellion also contributed to the tensions between Muslims and Hindus in undivided India before 1947.
5. It was because of the divide created by events like the Mappila Rebellion that the seeds of two nations, one for Muslims and another with a Hindu majority emerged.

This group of intellectuals thus point to the fact that there was nothing significant about the rebellion led by Mappila Muslims, neither in terms of the development and progress of the Mappila community nor in terms of bringing about change in the larger frame of the social and economic structure. The Mappila Rebellion was not able to challenge landlordism which existed in Malabar at that point of time or inflict damages to British colonial power.
Instead, most of the revolts, which according to them were religious in nature, ended up with the killing of upper caste Hindus, members of the colonial police force and a few administrators. This contributed to the depiction of Mappilas as aggressive fanatics which humiliated the whole Mappila community. According to Gangadharan and his followers, this became one of the reasons for Mappila Muslims’ later passivity in the social and political spheres of Kerala that ultimately led to their socio-economic backwardness. In short, these are the arguments of those who see nothing significant in the Mappila Rebellion. What stand out for them are only the losses and damages.

However, it is possible to see such an approach as less convincing because of the reason that, a good number of facts, a complete chronology of events are missing in the analysis of Professor Gangadharan and those who support his views. At the same time I am not accusing Professor Gangadharan for not giving a complete chronology of the events and its full fledged analysis because it is not possible for any author to write and publish a highly academically sound article in a popular Malayalam periodical because of the numerous constraints of writing for the popular periodical industry in Kerala. Nevertheless, I would also like to project the fact that it would be highly misleading for new generation students and scholars who have no prior sense of the context of the Mappila Rebellion if we do not give the chronological analysis of such a landmark event.

To fully grasp the necessity of the movement, we have to go back and study the feudal era in Malabar where traditional social and economic systems existed. We have to understand the period of Mysorean rule in Malabar when new land policies were introduced. Moreover, we cannot do without referring to the conditions of the peasantry under British colonial rule in Malabar during which time we see the beginning and end of the Mappila outrages. There is also a need to critically analyse different interpretations of the Mappila Rebellion, especially the colonial administrative view and those that followed its line. These works are crucially important for us now, because they represented the Rebellion for later generations. As this paper is based on secondary literature, my main debt is to the social scientists who have worked on Kerala and particularly on Mappila Rebellion that largely shaped my knowledge of this problem. In this paper, as a young scholar I am only focussing on students and scholars of my generation, to give them a detailed review of the events and happenings behind the making of the Mappila Rebellion.

The Background
Since medieval times Malabar had a unique landholding system, which was rooted and justified within the traditional structure of caste- based
occupational hierarchy. Customs and rights related to land were highly Brahmanical in nature. The ownership of land did not vest in any particular individual. Instead, different social groups, specifically caste groups had different rights and interests in land that corresponded to their position in the ritual and social hierarchies. According to William Logan (cited in Kunhi Krishnan 1993: 1-24), in Malabar, from the medieval period to the early British colonial time, the agrarian system worked through the mutual sharing of the net produce as per the customary rights and demands of different interest groups as detailed below:

**The Janmi (landlord):** They were Nambuthiri Brahmins who constituted the top level of the social and ritual hierarchies and had the largest right over land. This class of people was given rights over land by the native kings and rulers. These rights were recognized by birth and were called ‘Janmavakasham’ in Malayalam. Traditionally, Brahmins who have superior ritual status were assumed to do ritually superior work like interpreting Vedas, carrying out temple duties, and engaged as priests. They did not cultivate their land. Instead, the Brahmin Janmi gave his land to the next category in the agrarian social stratification of Malabar called ‘Kanakkaran’ for a fixed share of the produce of the soil which was usually one-third. Generally, each Brahmin landlord would have a number of Kanakkars working for him.

**The Kanakkaran:** This class of people was generally composed of the Nair caste and they came immediately below the Brahmins in the social and ritual hierarchy. The Kanakkaran was responsible for the supervision and security of the land. It was also the duty of the Nair Kanakkaran to deliver the share of the landlord without failure. He too was entitled to one-third of the net produce. A Kanakkaran would have a good number of ‘Verumpattakkar’ working for him.

**The Verumpattakkaran:** Generally, members of the Hindu lower caste called Thiyyas⁴ constituted this category. Malabar was known for the highest population of Mappilas⁵, and even though they remained outside the caste hierarchy, their social and economic status was considered similar to that of the Thiyyas. So Thiyyas and Mappila Muslims constituted the ‘Verumpattakkaran’ category. This class of people got ‘Verumpattam’ (simple lease) of land for one period of cultivation. The Mappilas and Thiyyas also had the customary right to one-third of the net produce.

Apart from these three major categories in the traditional agrarian structure of Malabar, there were two more categories of people: Cherujanakkaran who had small birthrights over land. This group was composed of the village washerman, blacksmith, carpenter, etc. Finally, there were the landless agricultural labourers mostly made up of outcastes and
untouchable castes.

**New Land Tenure System and Agrarian Discontent in Malabar**

The period of the rule of the Mysore Sultanate (1766-1792) saw major changes happening in Malabar. The Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan introduced new land policies that changed the existing socio-economic structure based on traditional rights and authority. The Mysore Sultanate implemented a revenue settlement in which the government fixed its expected share of revenue based on the actual produce from the land. Because of the new land revenue system and the fear of forcible religious conversion, a majority of the upper caste Hindu landlords of Malabar migrated to Travancore. Their land was allotted to the actual cultivators, mostly Mappilas (Menon 1995: 145). Some scholars observe that under Mysorean rule Mappila Muslims gained many favours, which included the temporary ownership of land. Nevertheless, from 1792 onwards when Malabar came under British rule, they introduced the plan of “states appropriation of the largest share of the produce and, secondly, it recognised the Janmi as the absolute proprietor of the land” (Panikkar 1990: vii-viii). So the upper caste Janmis returned to retrieve their lost land by seeking the help of the British government and its law courts. The British offered full support to the upper caste Hindus to re-establish their traditional authority over land. The idea of ‘absolute property rights’ derived its source from several Anglo-Roman juridical concepts which were till then unknown to the people of erstwhile Malabar. Consequently, all land became the private property of the Janmis. Earlier they had customary rights but now they gained legal rights through the sanctions of the modern British modern administrative measures.

The legal recognition of their right over land equipped the Janmis to forcefully evict their tenants with the help of the British police and the orders of civil courts. The British took it as an opportunity to get support for their rule by offering favours to the traditional landed elites by which they thought they could control, in their usage, the ‘illiterate and aggressive’ Mappilas. This led to the tie-up of feudal and colonial interests in Malabar. The motive of the British was the smooth running of their rule but in the process, the upper castes had won the right over land and property through legal means.

The (British) authorities recognised the Janmi as the absolute owner of his holding, and therefore free to take as big a share of the produce of the soil as he could screw out of the classes beneath him. Hence the Janmi on the Kanakkaran imposed harder and harder terms as time went on. (Gradually) the British Courts backed up by police and magistrates and troops and big guns made the Janmi’s independence complete. The hard terms thus imposed on the Kanakkaran had, of course, the effect of hardening the terms imposed by the Kanakkaran
on those below him, the Verumpattakkar. The one-third of the net produce to which the Verumpattakkaran was customarily entitled, was more and more encroached upon as the terms imposed on the Kanakkaran became harder and harder. (A Report of the Government of Madras. 1882, quoted in Kunhi Krishnan 1993:23).

Thus the condition of the lower tenants became pathetic in Malabar under the British regime. The land rent became as high as 75 to 80 percent of the net produce. Members of the lower strata composed of Mappila Muslims, Thiyyas and other lower caste Hindus became the main victims of this system. This general agrarian discontent led to a chain of violent outrages by the Mappilas among the Verumpattakkar from 1836 to 1921.

Rebellion

Many outbreaks - about thirtyfive times - among the Mappilas took place before the final rebellion of 1921. According to Gangadhara Menon (1995), most of these outbreaks were in the 19th century, especially during the period of eighteen years between 1836 and 1853. As per the colonial government’s records, most of the victims of the different attacks of the Mappila rebels were upper-caste Hindus. The killing of the British collector of Malabar Mr. H. V. Connolly in 1855 was an exception. The class background of 72 of the 82 Hindu victims is as follows (the rest are unknown): 19 were rich landlords or traditional moneylenders, 18 were guests, retainers, servants and similar dependants of landlords, 10 were members of landlord families, 4 were land agents or advisers of landlords, 5 were village headmen and 4 were government officials. This total of 60 people represents the upper-caste elites of the existing economic structure. The remaining twelve (of 72) were all lower class people – 3 labourers, 5 members of one labourer’s family, 2 cultivators, one priest and one teacher (Wood 1987: 170-171). These statistics of the reported cases of rebellions before 1921 are nothing when compared to the number of victims and the amount of losses after the final rebellion of 1921. British colonial records state that they had lost 43 troops with 126 army men wounded; 2337 rebels were killed, another 1652 injured and 45,404 imprisoned. However, unofficial reports say almost 10,000 Mappilas were killed. The number of imprisoned were almost 50,000 of whom 20,000 were deported to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and almost 10,000 Mappilas went missing.

Colonial Version of the Rebellion

There were two views that originated from the British side: The British government in 1852 appointed an official called T.L. Strange to enquire about the reasons and causes of the constant Mappila outrages. Strange discarded all possibility of agrarian or economic reasons for the emergence of the Mappila outrages. Instead, he attributed them to the fanaticism of the
Mappila Muslims. According to Gangadhara Menon, the Strange Report found the ignorant Mappilas, biased by the teaching of fanatical religious priests to be the reason for different outrages.

the most decided fanaticism… has furnished the true incentive to them… pride and intolerance fostered by the Mahomedan faith, coupled with the grasping and treacherous, and vindictive character of the Moplas in these districts drawn out to its worst extent have fomented the evil and it may be said to lie at the root thereof. (Strange, quoted in Wood 1987: 23).

Another British official, the District Collector William Logan was appointed to study the Mappila disturbances in 1881 because of the pressure on the British government to look at the economic and agrarian aspects of the Mappila outrages. As an administrator turned scholar, Logan observed that the reason behind Mappila outrages was actually the tensions related to land-tenure issues. Some fault lay with the British administration, especially on issues related to land tenure. In his own words, Logan claimed that Mappila uprisings aimed:

…to counteract the overwhelming influence, when backed by the British courts, of the Jenmis (landlords) in the exercise of the novel powers of ouster and of rent raising conferred upon them. A Jenmi who through the courts, evicted, whether fraudulently or otherwise, was deemed to have merited death, and it was considered a religious virtue, not a fault, to have killed such a man, and to have died in arms fighting against an infidel government which sanctioned such injustice. (Logan, quoted in Menon 1975:148-149).

Of these two views, Logan’s was soon forgotten, and it was Strange’s conception of fanatic Mappilas that remained in the mainstream. Thus, Strange’s study laid the foundation for further research on the Mappila Rebellion, especially from the West. Stephen F. Dale was one such successor of Strange.

Continuation of the Dominant Discourse

Stephen F. Dale’s study of the Mappila Rebellion (1980) centred on its religious aspect. According to Dale, blindly religious Mappila who were inspired by the preaching of fanatic leaders committed their life for religious activities. The religious leaders justified their preaching of attacking upper caste landlords and the ruling British as part of the project of ‘Jihad’. According to Dale, it was this aggressive attitude that led to many rebellions. He discussed the atrocities and exploitation experienced by the Mappila tenants under the rule of feudal-colonial nexus but he did not take it as a sufficient reason for the rebellion. Dale generalized from the Mappila Rebellion to the world Islamic community, claiming that the seeds of terrorism
in the contemporary period were etched into the tenets of Islam.

In another essay, Dale (1988) observed that there was a tendency within Islamic societies to encourage martyrdom in the name of religion. He observed that the rebellion of 1921 and some other small rebellions were examples of the pre-modern forms of Islamic terrorism. He concludes that it is obvious that the Mappilas of Malabar also showed the same ethics of Islam in killing their upper caste landlords. Dale refers to this act of organising Mappila tenants as religious suicide. He encourages social scientists who study contemporary Islamic terrorism to begin with this so-called pre-modern model of Islamic terrorism, which according to him is inspired from the ethics of political Islam. The danger of such reductive theories similar to Huntington’s thesis of the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ led many to take a relook at the events that gave rise to such ideas in the first place. In this regard, Conrad Wood’s work (1987) about the agrarian aspects of the Mappila Rebellion was a welcome one.

**Economic Interpretation**

The British Marxist scholar Conrad Wood gave an economic interpretation to the Mappila Rebellion. His study proceeded mainly on the basis of themes and perspectives rather than as a chronological description of events. For him, religion was simply a tool for making the Mappilas rebellious and organising them against economic exploitation. Referring to colonial records, Conrad Wood observed that Mappila outbreaks were a result of the antagonism between landlord and tenant or landlord and labourer. It was clear from the data that the victims were often rich landlords and their agents who were accused of using their traditional economic and social power against their tenants and labourers. He also notes that the local administration that included the village headmen, police and courts under the direct control of British regime favoured the Hindu upper castes and traditional landlords. The landlords used brutal strategies to evict their tenants with the support and recognition of the British police and courts. Because of such experiences, Mappila tenants understood that it was foolishness to expect any justice and help from British administration (Wood 1987: 8-9).

**Complex Linkages of the Rebellion**

Professor K.N. Panikkar (1992) formulated a comprehensive study about the Mappila Rebellion. While most scholars including Conrad Wood wanted to give a mono-causal account, Panikkar put forward a multi-causal explanation of the problem. He wanted to explain the complex inter-linkages between economic, religious, social and historical factors.

Scholars who supported the British colonial view and related the Mappila Rebellion to religious reasons had raised a serious question: If the
Mappila Rebellion was based on issues of economic and agrarian discontent, why did Hindu tenants who were also subjected to the same economic exploitation not take part in the rebellion? Why did Muslim tenants become rebellious while similarly situated lower-caste Hindu tenants remained passive? Tackling this question, Panikkar comes up with the following observations:

Firstly, the relation of Hindu tenants to their landlords was not just on economic terms. There were also religious and societal bonds that connected tenant and landlord. A landlord was often a leader of his community to whom his tenants also owed religious and social allegiance. Hindu tenants who felt the injustice of economic oppression therefore also had to think of the social boycott and ostracism that could result if they questioned relations that were apparently sanctioned by the laws of caste-based society.

According to Panikkar one gets a completely different picture of the Muslim community in this regard. Religion which was a constraining factor in the case of Hindu tenants provided the context for rebellion in a number of ways. For one, there were no commitments on religious or social grounds that bound Muslim tenants to their Hindu landlords. The traditional religious leaders of the community such as Tangals and Sayyids are said to have declared that it was no sin to kill those landlords who evicted tenants; that Islam did not forbid the use of violence in resisting such social injustices; and even that those who died in the effort would become martyrs who gained heaven. Becoming a ‘shaheed’ (martyr) in this manner was justified on moral and ideological grounds and in religious terms by religious authorities at all levels (Panikkar 1992:89).

Drawing on the ideas of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, Panikkar sees the role of Islamic religious leaders and thinkers in the making of the Mappila Rebellion being similar to the part played by ‘traditional intellectuals’ in organising people on various issues. These leaders had great influence on the popular culture of Malabar. It was because of the guidance and leadership of these traditional Islamic thinkers that the Mappilas of Malabar became organised against exploitation and oppression in the agricultural scene. They promoted a new kind of socio-political culture by using religion as a means, among the illiterate and backward Mappila men, which gave them religious justifications for the Mappila Rebellion.

The ideology of the ordinary Mappila was influenced by the religious line of these traditional intellectuals. It is from this ideological background that Mappila tenants got the energy to revolt against the injustices that they had to face. Since the traditional intellectuals among the Hindus were themselves landowners or of landowning families, leadership in organizing peasants against the system could not be expected from such quarters. In
Panikkar’s view, another impetus to rebellion that was provided by the religious context was the opportunity and space to come together: daily or weekly prayers\textsuperscript{10} and common festivals saw the Muslims of an area congregate.\textsuperscript{11} In the togetherness born out of religious sense, they could also share their common experiences and grievances and even formulate plans to resist the oppression they faced. Panikkar concludes:

That the Mappilas alone were able to translate discontent into organized action strongly underlines the religious context, but not necessarily the religious content, of the uprising. It suggests a connection between religion and revolt, normally not attributed to the legitimising role of the former. This connection was realised through the ideological underpinning of religion: a source of eschatological dreams, juxtaposing eternal bliss against worldly suffering; a system of moral values opposed to inequality and injustice; and a holy war against oppressors who were enemies of or supporters of the enemies of the faith. A variety of factors facilitated the mediation of these elements of religious ideology; the more important were the nature of early socialisation, the influence of popular culture, and the role of traditional intellectuals. The manner in which this mediation took place was indeed a complex process. (Panikkar 1992: 49).

Colonial and mainstream scholars cite many points in order to label the Mappila Rebellion as a religious uprising. However, we have to remember that Muslim religious leaders were not calling for jihad for the spreading of Islam or the protection of the faith. It was rather an encouragement to rise against economic oppression and exploitation that the community was facing. This further bears out Panikkar’s argument that religion provided the context, though not the content, for the rebellion.

All the revolts in Malabar beginning from 1826 until the final revolt of 1921 were the result of the inequality and exploitation that the peasantry faced: “The revolts, the dacoities, thefts and social banditry which occurred regularly were essential expressions of the protest of the rural poor against oppression and exploitation” (Panikkar 1992: 49). Yet it was a fact that Hindu participation was totally absent in the small revolts of the nineteenth century and was very limited in the revolt of 1921. It is also noted that Hindu peasants participated in other activities like thefts and dacoities but collective organisation and action had taken place only among the Mappilas (Panikkar 1992: 49-50). We could directly trace this to the reasons that Panikkar mentions, the lack of organization being especially significant.

It is also worth mentioning that the organization of the Mappilas of Malabar was very simple; not vertical and hierarchical as in the Hindu caste system. They also had a clear sense of the class of their enemies and oppressors, though not in the Marxian sense of ‘class enemies’. The Mappila
Rebellion was an example of an uprising of an economically exploited and oppressed group against their landlords and colonial rule, but Panikkar observes that they never realized their class potential at that time. The rural Mappilas had not grown into a class. Panikkar concludes that their consciousness was not class-based though they expressed a class-oriented ‘negative class consciousness’ which went unnoticed or was purposefully hidden by many of the elite Western scholars. The social and ideological mediation of religion and culture played a crucial role in rebellious activities in Malabar. Through Panikkar’s incisive analysis we can see religion providing the ideological context to the channelizing of the unrest of the Mappila peasants into open rebellion in a significant manner in the absence of powerful class parties or the politics of trade unionism.

The Role of Ideology in Agrarian Movements

According to Panikkar “in the absence of class consciousness and proper leadership, the ideological influence of religion provided the necessary moral force and justification to struggle against exploitation and oppression” (Panikkar 1992: 63). What I have drawn from Panikkar is the idea that the use of religion or religious ideas for mobilizing people against feudal-colonial oppression was but a historical necessity. It was a necessity because of many reasons which were peculiar to Malabar (which are explained in the first section). Another important reason is that class-based politics and democratic governance were simply not an option in the colonial setup. Apart from Panikkar’s work, there are many studies that tell the role of religion in leading peasant movements and revolts in other parts of the world (see Rodney Hilton 1977). It is obvious that in different periods of history, different ideologies including religion and other beliefs that were close to peasants had been important in deciding the nature and success of agrarian movements.

Sociologists working with agrarian issues generally say that there is some ideology behind every agrarian movement. Some scholars would argue that it is the dominant ideology or ruling class ideology that prevails in agrarian movements as they imagine peasants to be passive and incapable of thinking for themselves. Another group of scholars argue that in many agrarian movements one can see the dominance of the ideology of the subalterns. This is a very radical argument for many upper caste elite scholars who find it difficult to accept the fact that peasants or subalterns are capable of thinking for themselves. The exploited decide to use their own strategies to fight against exploitation and oppression, though their mobilization may be based on identities such as religion or caste.

A movement in the name of an identity, even if against economic oppression may easily be labelled as being related specifically to that identity, as we saw from the British Government and colonial scholars’ dismissal of
the rebellion of 1921 simply as ‘fanatic Mappila outrages’. Scholars like Rodney Hilton would argue that labelling agrarian movements based on the kind of ideology involved in it is only one way of looking at the problem, i.e. in a movement one cannot expect an independent ideology unbiased by elements like religion which are closer to the everyday life of peasants. Take for instance, the Santhal rebellion in colonial Bengal. The leaders of this movement mobilised peasants by saying that their god had sent them to organise and fight against oppression and to liberate them from British colonial rule. They were supposed to fight against the outsiders (the Santhals call the outsiders Dikkus) which included the British who were taking over the Santhals’ land and property. Scholars like Suprakash Roy saw the Santhal movement as a religious movement because religious ideology worked behind this (see Guha 1983a and 1983b). However, Roy did not consider the issue of land or agrarian issues behind this movement. Subaltern scholars like Ranajit Guha interpreted the Santhal Rebellion very differently. Guha says that leaders of the Santhal movement used religious sentiments to invoke people’s consciousness. He observed that religion, which was very close to the people’s emotion, provided an easy way to communicate with them and effectively mobilise them against oppression (Guha 1983b).

**Conclusion**

For a student of Sociology, it would be satisfactory only when an event like the Mappila Rebellion has been analysed within its specific context. Different Mappila Rebellions broke out in Malabar between 1836 and 1921. There is a whole history and genealogy behind the Mappila Rebellion. This history and genealogy were missing in the arguments of the group of people who only worried about the losses and damages of the historic Mappila Rebellion. We can find many similarities between earlier dominant colonial versions about the Mappila Rebellion and the views of this group. The only difference is that the colonialists wanted to demoralize and depict the Mappila revolts as born of religious fanaticism in order to prove that there was nothing wrong with the policies of the colonial government and the rebellion was not directed against the colonial government. Therefore they tried to depict Mappila outrages as a fight between Muslims and Hindus. British colonial scholars were not at all sympathetic to the issues of Mappila peasants.

The present-day group, however, represents itself as being sympathetic to the conditions of the Mappila community. They explicitly exhort the Mappilas of contemporary Malabar to forget the Mappila Rebellion because they consider it as a black lesson in the history of the Mappila community. At the same time, they proclaim their happiness in the achievements of the Mappila community today, like their contribution to Kerala’s economy through Gulf migration. The crux of their argument is, forget your failures (for them
The Mappila Rebellion was one such failure, very much dependent on traditional religious ideas and therefore insignificant) and celebrate only your achievements. In responding to the question of why I do not support the group of people who demand the giving up of the memories of the Mappila Rebellion I can clarify my position through the following points:

The ideology of religion was very close to the Mappila peasants, and it provided them the opportunity to protest against oppression and exploitation. Further, there was no space for a secular culture and no class-based political party or trade union had been formed yet. Only such a contextual understanding can give us the whole picture, which is missing in the ahistorical readings of those who are against the commemoration of the Mappila Rebellion. There were many significant and positive outcomes of this rebellion. It was the very first voice of protest against landlordism in Malabar. It turned against the colonial government in the second phase. These two aspects, resistance against landlordism and later the colonial government, have to be appreciated. It is a fact that they did not organize themselves into peasant movements. The Mappilas only saw a particular Janmi or a particular officer oppressing them and could not make out the interplay of landlordism and colonial administration in making their situation so vulnerable. Unfortunately, because of ignorance and lack of effective guidance they got the image of a communal movement. This aspect of the rebellion must be condemned.

I believe in the fact that only through the remembrance of certain events (such as the Mappila Rebellion here) can the subjects see their past. In remembering the Mappila Rebellion, we can appreciate its positives and significance and at the same time acknowledge the failures and mistakes which were committed. It must be made clear that those who stress the importance of the Mappila Rebellion ask for its *commemoration* and not for its celebration. For students of historical sociology, memories are very important irrespective of whether they are good or bad. To forget the Mappila Rebellion would be to disown a past that involved a strong subaltern movement that became a turning point in the history of colonial Malabar. What is needed is to accept the lessons of the movement and at the same time recognise its limitations. The memory of the subaltern has to be kept alive, otherwise it would amount to surrendering to those very forces that subjugated them in the first place.

It is non-sociological and ahistorical to take out particular facts in order to claim that something is significant or non-significant. I have tried, nonetheless, to offer a sociological perspective through this article because of the strong belief that a sociological analysis could uncover the significance of contextual analysis. I have indirectly stressed the idea that there is
difference between different kinds of “remembering” and “forgetting”. Social memory must not be reduced to notions of pride or shame. So if there is any element of celebration or pride in the memorialisation of the Malabar Rebellion, these elements must be resisted. But scholars cannot be asked to forget any part of history, even if they sometimes do actually forget (in the sense of failing to study something), and there is surely no sense in forgetting “failures”. But the line between celebration and historical (scholarly) memory can be thin and this needs attention. In any case, as is now well established, all history is about the present, and is re-cast and re-interpreted through the lens of the present and its concerns. After all, as Milan Kundera writes in one of his famous novels, “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

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Notes

1. The British used the term Moplah instead of Mappila.
2. The debate was started with an article by Prof. Gangadharan published by Mathrubhumi weekly and went on with other people joining and commenting on it through a series of articles.
3. For writing this paper, I have drawn ideas and facts from numerous sources and unfortunately I could not do justice to some scholars by giving a complete reference to their share. I have lost the original version of this paper during an unexpected data loss which occurred to my personal
computer while reworking on the original draft of this paper. I specifically wish to acknowledge that the suggestions and many ideas emerged during my informal conversations with my former Professor K.E.N., a noted intellectual figure of contemporary Kerala, had played a crucial role in shaping the direction of this paper.

4. According to Brahmanical version, Thiyyas were considered as polluting caste among the caste ladder of Hindus in Kerala. Thiyya’s ranked lower than the Nairs but slightly above the Cheruma’s/ Pulayas which are also the two other polluting castes of Hindu caste hierarchy.

5. A group of Muslims who represented the earliest converts to Islam.

6. The significance of 1792 is that the third Anglo- Mysore War took place which siege of Srirangapattanam took place and Tipu Sulthan was defeated and killed in 1799 during the fourth Anglo- Mysore War then onwards the kingdom of Mysore came under the British directive.

7. It is the traditional relations of the caste system that are being referred to here.

8. Tangals and Sayyids were known for their deep knowledge of Qur’an and theology. Therefore, scholars like Panikkar consider them as the traditional intellectuals of Islam.

9. Among the peasantry of Malabar (which included Hindus as well), there were widespread beliefs about the supernatural powers of the traditional intellectuals who gave them leadership. The Umar Qasi of Veliyangode was supposed to have the power to disappear from police lockups; the Chembraseri Tangal could apparently convert bullets flying at him into water or cotton; the Tangals of Mamburam were known for curing incurable diseases, making it rain in peak summer, replanting uprooted trees, etc (Panikkar 1992: 59-65).

10. Namaz or Niskaaram prayer five times a day with special importance to Friday prayer (Juma) at the mosque is one of the five pillars of Islamic faith.

11. Rodney Hilton in Bond Men Made Free, a study of peasant revolts in Medieval Europe points to the role of Christian festivals and communal feasts in the development of rebellious spirit among the peasantry. He also points to the leadership role of priests in fomenting rebellion at the same time.

12. The possibility to become an economic class – a class for itself as against a class in itself.

13. Negative class-consciousness: the Mappilas had the consciousness of the ‘class’ of their enemy but they did not consider themselves as a class.

14. I am indebted to Prof. Satish Deshpande for providing these ideas to frame my conclusion part in a coherent manner.
References

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