

Chapter 9

“I am Gulf”: The production of cosmopolitanism among the Koyas of Kozhikode, Kerala

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Introduction: Kozhikode and the Gulf

A few weeks after our arrival in Kozhikode (known as Calicut during colonial times) we were introduced to Abdulhussein (Abdulbhai), an export agent who runs a family business together with his three younger brothers. He sat behind a desk in his sparsely furnished office on Beach Road. Abdulbhai is reading a Gujarati newspaper, while one of his younger brothers is talking on the phone in Hindi to a client from Bombay. The office is quiet and so is business: our conversation is only interrupted by the occasional friend who peeps into the office to greet Abdulbhai. He begins:

Business is dead, all the godowns (warehouses) along the beach are closed; all the other exporters have closed down. But at my father's time it was all different. During the trade season, there would be hundreds of boats anchored offshore, with barges full of goods going to and fro. There were boats from Bombay, from Gujarat, from Burma and Ceylon, but most of them belonged to Arabs. Down the road there were the British warehouses, and on the other end there is the Beach Hotel, only Britishers stayed there. The beach front was busy with carts and lorries and there were hundreds of Arab sailors walking up and down. The Arab boats arrived as soon as the monsoon was over, in October, and the last left the following May, before the rain started. Some of the boats were owned by Kozhikode businessmen, but the majority belonged to Arab traders.

You could see the boat owners sitting on the verandas outside the offices of the exporters. They had telescopes and looked out for the boats: they could recognise boats by the size and shape of the sails. Some of these Arabs came to Kozhikode for the whole trading season, others had settled here. They married and had families, children. Arab sailors ate and slept in the godowns. They were away from home for a long time and they also took ‘wives’ here. So many Muslims here have an Arab father: everyone knows that! There were some really big traders to the Gulf here, very, very wealthy people. You can see their offices down the road. Some of these big traders were Arabs, two from Kuwait, one from Bahrain and another from Yemen. Even a black man from Sudan settled here. The last Arab boat came here in 1975. They found oil, made huge fortunes. What is the point of them coming here? Now it is Malayalis who go to the Gulf!

What Abdulbhai traces here is common knowledge and a shared Kozhikode-wide discourse. He tells a story evoking the continued connections between Kozhikode and the Gulf countries of West Asia, a circulation of people, goods and religious practices historically linking these two regions. The diverse experiences of the past – when commerce brought to Kozhikode traders from far and wide – and the present – when Kozhikode migrants travel to the Gulf to work and live alongside people from all over the world – are brought together in popular discourse to highlight the ‘cosmopolitanism’ of the city and its inhabitants. But for Koyas, the Kozhikode Muslim community with whom we conducted fieldwork from 2002 to 2004, cosmopolitanism goes beyond a celebration of cultural sophistication.¹ Cosmopolitanism is a discourse through which a specific and exclusive local identity is objectified and valorised, at the same time assimilating and distinguishing Koyas from other communities in Kozhikode and beyond. The Koya residential area of Kozhikode – Thekkepuram, with its highly specific matrilineal *tharavadus* (joint households) – and the Gulf – connected historically to Kozhikode through trade and

¹ Fieldwork was conducted in Kozhikode, U.A.E., Oman and Kuwait from October 2002 to June 2004 with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council, UK (grant No. R000239766) and the Nuffield Foundation, UK (Social Science Small Grants Scheme). We have been affiliated to the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, and the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai. We are grateful for comments on earlier versions of this paper to Geert de Neve, Jon Mitchell, William Clarence-Smith, the participants of the Gulf Migration Conference (Bellagio, June 2005) and the editors of this volume.

migration – become inseparable, braided reference points of Koya identity and claims for superior status. In turn, however, the experience of contemporary migration to and from the Gulf re-aligns historical notions and practices of urban cosmopolitanism through which Koyas define their own and their city's identity.

What we find most useful in thinking about Kozhikode Koyas' discursive production of a sense of cosmopolitanism, and in understanding that actually it is not at all the product of a contradiction or a break or even an interaction between a 'global force' acting on a 'local place', is Anna Tsing's essay on 'The Global Situation' (2002, orig. 2000; see also 2004). Tsing reminds us of the hubris of post-war modernisation theory, of its links to developmentalism, and asks us whether, in a rush to theorise globalisation, we are not in danger of repeating those same earlier mistakes. As she warns, 'Globalization draws our enthusiasm because it helps us imagine interconnection, travel, and sudden transformation. Yet it also draws us inside its rhetoric until we take its claims for true descriptions' (2002: 456). Tsing asks us instead to 'study folk understandings of the global, and the practices with which they are intertwined' (2002: 469). She also calls for more ethnography which demonstrates highly particularistic intersections of, and co-operations between, situated and specific 'projects', or 'historically specific collaborations' (2002: 472; see also Barendse 1998; Freitag 2003; Laffan 2002; Tarazi Fawaz et al. 2001). The study of 'concrete trajectories and engagements' (Tsing 2002: 475), set in an understanding of the importance of interests and identity offers us, she argues, an antidote both to grand theory inebriated by its own rhetoric, and to the nihilistic despair engendered by taking the global as always necessarily encompassing the grand scale of the planet in its entirety. Tsing is, after all, only reminding us of what anthropologists have always done best: tempered the reach of social theory with the gentle corrective of empirical material. This paper is then an attempt to recount one such concrete set of highly specific and historically situated global engagements.

Kozhikode City: Past and Present

With a population of roughly half a million people, Kozhikode is Kerala's third largest city and, although Muslims are not the majority, it is considered to be the Muslim capital of Kerala. Kozhikode town, at the centre of Kozhikode District, sits right next to the Muslim-majority district of Malappuram, and there is plenty of

coming and going between the two. Importantly, alongside local Muslims, Hindus and Christians in Kozhikode, there also live significant (economically and culturally, rather than numerically) immigrant trading communities, predominantly Gujarati Hindus, Jains and Bohri, but also Konkani Hindus and Muslims, who settled in the city towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Kozhikode was prosperous with maritime trade from the tenth to the fifteenth century, developing rapidly over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a commercial hub between West Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia (Bouchon 1987, 1988; Das Gupta 1967; McPherson 1993). Akin to other Indian Ocean port cities of the time, Kozhikode had a noticeable population of visiting or resident 'foreign' merchants from the east (China, Java and Ceylon) and the west (Egypt, Yemen and Persia), as well as from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. At the time of Ibn Battuta's visit in 1342 the chief merchant and harbour master was one Ibrahim from Bahrain, suggesting a strong Arab presence, confirmed by the existence of two mosques and a *qazi* (Muslim judge) of Arab origins (Shokoohy 2003). Almost a century later, the Chinese Muslim traveller Ma Huan reports that in Kozhikode 'many of the king's subjects are Muslims and there are twenty or thirty mosques in the kingdom', adding that the king employed two Muslim administrators (see Dale 1980: 27).

Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498 and began a long and bloody struggle to wrench away control of pepper trade from the 'Moors', merchants from Egypt and the Arabian peninsula. While it seems unlikely that the Portuguese presence completely disrupted existing trade networks in the Indian Ocean, its effect on Kozhikode was significant: for a period, the Portuguese monopolised pepper trade and, following continual harassment, Arab traders left the city (Barendse 1998; Bouchon 1987, 1988; Das Gupta 1967; c.f. Subrahmanyam 1997). This is the period when Gujarati traders, encouraged by Portuguese policies, reinforced their presence in the city (Bouchon 1987: 167).

The second half of seventeenth century saw the waning of Portuguese power, the rise of Dutch companies (Arasaratnam 1994; Das Gupta 1967) and, in the middle of the eighteenth century, came the Mysorean conquest of Malabar. During this period, Kozhikode ceased to be a hub for trans-oceanic commerce; it remained, however, an

export centre for local products and an entry point for goods from West Asia and North India. The eventual defeat of Tippu Sultan and the establishment of British rule in 1792 did not substantially change the position of the city: while Bombay developed as the main international export centre, trade from Kozhikode concentrated on the movement of goods to, and through, Bombay and Gujarat (Das Gupta 1967; Subramaniam 1996).

Emerging as a major rice market in the region, Kozhikode also saw a resurgence of Arab trade from West Asia. From the nineteenth century until the middle of the 1980s, the colonial and post-colonial economy gave a major boost to local trade: the city became a world centre for timber export and, later, the centre for the commerce of copra. In the late 1970s, the timber trade declined and, following the Gulf oil boom, all resident Arabs left and Arab ships stopped coming to the city, leading to the eventual closure of all port facilities. As in the rest of Kerala, from the 1980s Kozhikode's economy became dependent upon the revenues and remittances of Persian Gulf migration.

Koyas' Identities: Trade and Tharavadus

Kozhikode Koyas are a Muslim community closely connected to Thekkepuram (lit. 'south place'), a neighbourhood in the south-west of the city where the majority of the community either continues to live or has its roots. Thekkepuram is the oldest remaining part of the city, an area of (mostly crumbling) large joint households (*tharavadus*) and old mosques, delimited by the sites of the community's present and past economic activities: commodity bazaars to the north; retail bazaars to the east; coastal godowns to the west and river-side timber yards and wood mills to the south. Commerce in timber, copra and rice, together with trade with the Gulf countries are economic activities which have been, at different points in time, dominated by Koyas. Their successes allowed the local middle classes to accumulate substantial capital from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Trade with the Arab peninsula occupies a special place in the historical imagination of Koyas, often well beyond its actual economic importance. Within living memory,

Arab traders, some of whom had their own warehouses and either settled or spent a considerable part of the year in Kozhikode, are remembered to have brought goods from Basra, Kuwait and Oman and returned with spices, timber, coir and other locally produced consumer goods (c.f. Onley 2004). But, as oral history recounts, the most lucrative side of twentieth century Kozhikode Gulf trade came from smuggling: during the two world wars it was tyres and petrol which went from Kozhikode to the Gulf; later it was gold, and later still it was migrants. From the 1950s onwards, until the 1990s liberalisation of import regulations, gold began to flow in the opposite direction, from the Gulf to Kozhikode.² Smuggling certainly brought enormous riches, not only to those directly involved in the trade, but to the whole of Thekkepuram, and it eventually replaced timber and spices as the major source of capital accumulation.

With the slow death of the timber and Arab trade, together with the incipient decline of commodity bazaars, migration to the Gulf has become the primary source of income. It is rare to find any household of Koyas without at least one member in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait or Oman. Migrants to the Gulf have been investing heavily in petty trade, whether on their final resettlement back in Kerala, or by financing the business activities of family members or friends. A few have set up successful transnational or Gulf-based businesses.

Trade and commerce remain the preferred source of employment for Koyas, even when such activities rely on continuous financing from Gulf remittances. Defining themselves primarily as a business community, Koyas set themselves apart from the lower status Muslims who live along the coastal area of Thekkepuram such as daily labourers in the bazaar, fishermen and other non-Muslim Malayalis. But there are other Kozhikode communities with strong business orientations: traders of Gujarati origin and non-Koya Muslims. The Koyas distinguish themselves from the Gujaratis in terms of businesses practices (e.g. involvement in money-lending and inter-coastal trade) and orientation (stress upon economic planning and calculation), as well as lifestyle (saving, thriftiness). From non-Koya Muslims, differences are inscribed in status, kinship and residence. Koyas link their own origins to historic relations with Arab traders (Fanselow 1996, c.f. Miles 1973, 1975).

² Circulation of gold between the Gulf and South India has, of course, a long history, stretching well back to pre-colonial and early colonial times (see Barendse 2002, Prakash 2004).

If trade is one pole the Koyas use to distinguish themselves from others, another is kinship. Unlike the majority of Muslims in Kerala, Koyas see themselves as a *marumakkatayam* (matrilineal) community whose exclusive status is maintained by generalised endogamy.³ Ahmed Koya, a copra broker in his sixties, explained one evening as a group of friends sat *time passing* on a bench:

Koyas are the descendants of Arabs who came here to trade. They were very well received and respected by the Zamorin Rajah [erstwhile Hindu rulers of Kozhikode] who gave them land, allowing them to settle. At that time, Arab merchants and sailors had to stay here for a considerable time; they were away from home for many months and so they married local ladies [*mut'a* marriage]. These women were Nayars, they were *savarna* [caste] Hindus. The men were Muslims, so their children also became Muslims. The Rajah was so pleased with these Muslim traders that he even encouraged the parents to convert to Islam all children born on Fridays. Other local Nayars also converted, and that is why we are *marumakkatayam*, like Nayars.

This alleged Arab-cum-upper caste origin is used to draw distinctions between Koya and non-Koya Muslims. As Ahmedka continued to explain:

Muslims don't have castes like Hindus, but still we are not all the same. Here there are *onnum* number [number one] Muslims who are Koyas and live in *tharavadus* [joint households]. They are *marumakkatayam*, of mixed Nayar and Arab origin and they are traders. Then there *randam number* [number two] who are also *marumakkattayam*, but live in small *tharavadus*; they are converted from lower castes like Tiyyas [casteless (*avarna*) Hindus related to Izhavas of Southern Kerala; see Osella and Osella 2000a], and worked as labourers or servants of *onnum numbers*. They are also Koyas, but different: *onnum numbers* don't marry with them. The last are *muunum number* [number three], the fishermen living along the beach. They are poor, illiterate and follow *makattayam* [patrilineal] system. Then there are Arabs from Yemen, like the

³ While Koyas define themselves as matrilineal, this is actually only partly the case. Unlike the truly matrilineal Kannur Muslims (the erstwhile royal family, the Ali Rajahs) and the northern coastal Muslim community, the Keyis (see Gough 415ff; c.f. McGilvray 1989), Koyas are matrilineal only in so far as they recognise descent through female line; inheritance follows a combination of matrilineal traditions and *shari'a* law.

Thangals [Hadrami Sayyid families claiming descent from the Prophet; see Abdul Sathar 1999; Dale 1997; Freitag 2003; c.f. Miller 1976: 255ff;], but they don't allow their women to marry others. They are the highest!

Kozhikode Koyas also distinguish themselves from Muslims from the interior of Malappuram District, the Mappilas, who are *makattayam* (patrilineal) and were largely agricultural, at least before they started to migrate to the Gulf (see Dale 1980; Miller 1976). While some intermarriage does occur, notably when urban Koyas trade their status for the rural wealth of Mappilas, a great distinction is drawn between the two communities and mutual antipathy generally prevails. Status hierarchies are rationalised as substantial differences in *swabhavam* (essentialised nature, see Osella and Osella 2000a: 231ff) between classes of people, expressed through notions of occupation (trade as opposed manual labour and fishing), class (wealthy traders as opposed to poorer labourers and fishermen), *culture* (educated *onnum numbers* as opposed to partially educated or illiterate *randam* and *muunu numbers*) and religious practice (reformist-inclined *onnum numbers* opposed to saint-worshipping *randam* and *muunu numbers*, see Bayly 1989: 71ff; Fanselow 1996; McGilvray 1998; c.f. Mines 1973, 1975; Vatak 1996).

These hierarchies of status are objectified in marriage and residence practices. Being a Koya belonging to one of the established and reputed matrilineages in Thekkepuram is a clear indication of long-standing prominence. But while *tharavadus* furnish Koyas with a measure of internal and external status, the cramped living conditions in houses which are often in disrepair and decay make *tharavadu* life unappealing for many. Amidst constant jokes that *tharavadus* are 'like hostels' and that the people living there might not even know how (or if) they are related to the people they live with, whoever has the financial resources, typically successful Gulf migrants, will build a new house and shift to a nuclear household. As a shortage of land and a high population density makes it practically impossible to build new houses in Thekkepuram, returnees from the Gulf have been following the established middle class in buying land from impoverished high-status Hindu landowners and relocating to high-prestige areas.

The history of Thekkepuram *tharavadus* expresses then the complex unfolding of Koyas' identity. On the one hand, *tharavadus* stand for claims to upper caste Hindu descent, and hence status. But stronger claims to *marumakkatayam* traditions puts Koyas in a difficult position vis-à-vis Islam, which of course prescribes patrilineal inheritance; and yet, the Koyas claim superior status over patrilineal Muslims, such as fishermen and Mappilas. This tension, only partially resolved by the partial adoption of *shari'a* inheritance, becomes even sharper following *mujahid* (followers of post 1950s Kerala's Islamic reformist movements) campaigns for the adoption of 'true' Islamic practices where *marumakkatayam* has no part. Even strongly reformist Koyas embrace here the relativist discourse, otherwise dismissed as un-Islamic, justifying matrilineal orientations as a culturally specific adaptation of Islam, local custom (*adab*) which does not then breach the tenets of the Quran. *Tharavadus* also stand for Koya claims to Arab descent and early conversion to Islam via continuous trade with the Gulf; but they also testify to a strong involvement with the colonial economy, a period of history which has become muted in local historical narratives.

We Have Always Been Cosmopolitans

"We [Muslims] are different here in Kozhikode, we live next to each other" comments Ahmedka during another of the menfolk's evening meetings, "we mingle with each other and do business together." "We have never been separated from Hindus," chips in Basheer: "We always had peaceful relations here. Look, in Kozhikode we dress like everyone else, you can't tell a Muslim from a Hindu or a Christian from what they wear. In North India, Muslims dress and speak differently, they stay apart from others and therefore there are always troubles. But not here."⁴ Ahmedka continues:

The first Arab trader who arrived here went to meet the Rajah. The Arab gave the Rajah a jar of pickle and asked him to keep it safe until the his return the following season. After one year he returned and the Rajah gave him the jar

⁴ This claim is made only, of course, for men. Although it is commonly made, it is not strictly true. All Malayali non-Muslim men, for example, even those with modest incomes wear gold neck chains, rings and identity bracelets. Only Muslims, for religious reasons, either totally eschew jewellery or limit themselves to rings made of silver set with semi-precious stones. While Hindu men generally prefer to wear a moustache, Muslim men will be, mostly, clean shaven. *Mujahid* men will invariably have a scar on their forehead as a result of prostrations during prayers (c.f. Soares 2004).

back. The trader opened it and took out a gold coin. It was a test: as the Rajah proved trustworthy, the Arabs began to trade in Kozhikode. The Zamorin Rajah was very fond of Arab traders and gave them honours and land. He encouraged local people to marry Arabs and convert to Islam. Koyas collected dues from the merchants on behalf of the rajah and kept a portion to themselves.

Focusing on the benevolence and religious tolerance of local Hindu rulers, the pickle jar story underscores many themes commonly found in state-wide narratives.⁵ In a rhetoric shared by both left and centre political parties, communal harmony and tolerance are popularly represented as one of the distinguishing traits of Kerala. Communal harmony is represented as the clear expression of the spirit of tolerance which, together with a wider progressive orientation, defines the Malayali's unique identity. It is taken for granted that religious tolerance distinguishes Malayalis from other Indians who, on the face of recurrent episodes of communal violence, do not appear to be so inclined.⁶

In Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) discourse, on the other hand, the benevolence of Kozhikode's Hindu Rajahs, the Zamorins, takes an altogether different slant. It highlights that Hinduism, unlike Islam, is a broad-minded religion, capable of coexisting alongside different faiths and orientations (it must also be remembered here that Kerala has a substantial Christian population). The enlightened attitudes of the Zamorins are undermined by Muslims' zealous intolerance, represented here by the persecutions and alleged forced conversions taking place during the Mysorean invasions of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan, and later during the 1920s Mappila uprising. The rhetoric of Hindutva leads to negative comparison and a critique of contemporary practices: Muslims are accused of using their Gulf-acquired money aggressively, to push out other communities from business and residential areas.

Muslims like Ahmedka however characterise the Hindu rulers' piety differently, citing another popular story, which appears in the *Tohfut-ul-Mujahideen* (a sixteenth-

⁵ The story of the pickle jar appears in different versions in the *Keralolpathi*, an eighteenth century collection of Kerala's popular legends (see Menon 1962).

⁶ In 2003, extreme communal violence did break out around the coastal fishing area of Marad. Most locals were keen to portray this as an isolated set of incidents, attributing it to the actions of ignorant and poor fishermen. Great efforts were made, especially among Muslim community leaders and social service organisations, to dampen things down and make peace. There was a strong will to limit the violence, stop it spreading and prevent re-occurrence (c.f. Varshney 2002).

century account of the Portuguese conquest of Malabar by Shayik Zaynu'd-din of Ponnani) and the *Keralolpathi*. This is the controversial story of the conversion of the last Cheraman Perumal (king of Chera dynasty) to Islam, a story taken as truthful by some historians (see Bahauddin 1992: 21–24; Ibrahim Kunju 1989: 14–20; c.f. Logan 1989 [1887]: 192; Miller 1976: 46ff), but dismissed by others as fictional (see Menon 1962: 83, note 1). Based in the port town of Kodungaloor (erstwhile Cranganore), the Rajah converts to Islam, partitions his kingdom and decides to follow Arab Muslim traders back to their land. In Ahmedka's version of the story, the voyage takes place during the lifetime of the Prophet; eventually the Cheraman Perumal decides to return together with a party of Arabs led by one Malik Ibn Dinar, for some a Companion of the Prophet and for others a follower of the Sufi saint Hassa ul-Basri (see Ibrahim Kunju 1989: 20–21). In either case, the Rajah dies before setting sail. He leaves, however, a letter of introduction for his fellow travellers who, in time, reach Kodungaloor from where they propagate Islam peacefully and establish mosques right across Kerala.

Ahmedka concludes his story by stressing the wider cultural role of Arabs:

Arabs wore beautiful clothes, while people here had only a short *mundu* [cloth] across their waist and were bare-chested. It is the Arabs who brought clothes here. They were also very knowledgeable, in mathematics, astronomy and other things.

Ahmedka is making a case for Kozhikode's long-standing cosmopolitanism, understood not as a top-down or elite form of proto-globalisation (c.f. Hannerz 1989), but as something more like Tsing's reading of circulation, as a highly specific and situated 'series of historically specific collaborations that create distinctive cultural forms of capitalism' (2002:474). It is characterised in Koya narratives as a fruitful encounter between Arab and Malayali, set within a framework of a beneficent and peaceful expansion of Islam, bringing moral and economic well-being and engendering new identities and family forms even as it created new business. This period of overall prosperity is contrasted with the destructions and miseries brought by Portuguese conquest and the indignities and humiliations of British rule. Colonial decline is eventually redressed by independence – associated with the rise of the

Muslim League to represent Muslim interests in post-independence Kerala – and, more crucially, by the 1970s beginning of Gulf migration.

Cosmopolitanism Revisited

Ahmedka's exemplary Koya-specific perspective is significant for its selective deployment of historical memories. In the neighbouring district of Malappuram, where Muslims are the majority, as amongst 'traditionalist' religious organisations, the colonial period evokes memories not just of resistance to the Portuguese, but, more importantly, to the British. The famous Mappila uprisings (see Dale 1980; Panikkar 1989) are presented as a powerful symbol of the heroic defiance by Muslims of foreign oppression and anti-Muslim rule, the culmination of a time-honoured tradition stretching back to the anti-Portuguese struggle (Kurup and Mathew 2000; Miller 1976: 68ff). But Koyas seldom mention the Mappila uprisings, a milestone in Malabar Muslim history. Now it must be stressed that public references to the rebellion are generally avoided because they might evoke unwelcome associations to the 'fanatical Muslims' of colonial and Hindu historiography (see Hitchcock 1925; Nair 1923) from which the whole community seeks to distance itself at a time when Muslims in India and beyond are commonly associated to extremism and terrorist activities. But in Kozhikode, lack of reference to the rebellion is also indicative of the fact (nowadays rather unpalatable) that not only did Thekkepuram traders do relatively well under British colonialism, but also that many community leaders, members of the substantially anglophile middle class, sided with the British during the uprising.

The narratives of Koyas tend to focus instead on the post-rebellion period when Malabar's Muslims closed in upon themselves, distancing themselves from the processes of colonial-driven modernisation which were enthusiastically embraced all over Kerala by Christians and Hindus alike. Koyas then oppose Thekkepuram's self-ascribed cosmopolitanism and modern outlook to the conservative (read: backward) orientation of rural Malappuram Muslims. We were reminded many a time that in Malappuram Muslims refused to engage with modern education; instead, privileging Arabi-Malayalam over both English and written Malayalam, deemed respectively the languages of *shaitan* (the devil) and *kafirs* (non-believers). In Thekkepuram however the anglophile merchant middle-class had built two schools in the early twentieth

century (Himayatul Islam High School, in 1908, and Madrasathul Muhammadiyah Vocational High School, 1918) with the blessing of the colonial administration. Thekkepuram is proud of its educational achievements, perhaps modest compared to those of Kozhikode Hindus and Christians, but certainly significant in relation to Malappuram Muslims.

We have said that Koyas' sense of status and class distinction is translated in popular discourse as an opposition between Thekkepuram's 'modern cosmopolitan' orientation and the 'traditionalism' of rural Muslims; this opposition is also articulated at the level of religious practice. Regardless of specific religious affiliations or orientations, Koyas share Islamic reformist critiques of 'traditionalism' couched in terms of superstition, ignorance, blind following of 'traditional' religious leaders and overall cultural 'backwardness' (see Robinson 2004). The ideological influence of the *mujahids* around Kozhikode is considerable. Reformism, focusing on religious learning and 'western' education, is generally associated both to a 'true' Islam' (to which Koyas claim direct descent via ancestry from or conversion by Arab traders) and to the modern outlook of the old and new local middle classes. Traditionalism has become associated, then, to ignorance, superstition and uncouthness; it is seen as characteristic of either rural (Mappila) or poor (*randam* and *munnum number*) Muslims, to the extent that even 'traditionalist' Koyas no longer participate openly in the annual festival of local shrines, so as not to be seen mingling with rustic rural and urban low status devotees. While 'traditionalist' practices are increasingly confined to the domestic realm, organisations devoted to the social and educational 'upliftment' of Muslims are thriving: from all-Kerala outfits such as the Muslim Educational Society and the Muslim Service Society, to local groups such as CIESCO (Citizens' Intellectual Educational Social and Cultural Organisation). Such organizations not only campaign for and support Muslim children's formal education but organise regular *camps* or seminars to 'enlighten' poor Muslims about the need for education, hygiene and, generally, a 'systematic life'.

Sympathies for reformism have also led to redefinition and critique of local orientations towards cosmopolitanism and modernity. "The main activity here was gambling" remembered Aslam, a retired copra merchant.

In the evening men gathered in *clubs* above shops to play cards. Lots of money was lost! And there was also drinking. In the 1960s, strip-tease became popular. Now all this is finished: people realised it was bad. It is *haram*, forbidden for Muslims.

Abdul Gafoor, a timber merchant, continues:

Twenty years ago nobody went to mosques. There was not even need for a call for prayer! When someone died, people stayed outside the mosque, smoking ... When I was young [in the 1940s], if you were ill your mother would take you to a *Thangal* who would blow over a glass of water and give it to you to drink. What cure was that?

While these statements betray partisan support for *mujahid* reformism, Gafoor and Aslam are giving voice to a general unease about the past. They present emerging colonial and post-colonial (secularising) modernism and enduring religious traditionalism as matching evils, leading respectively to moral corruption and reproduction of superstitious ignorance.

Critical appraisal of the past leads to a separation of progress from westernisation, hence explaining the erasure of colonial connections from the dominant narratives and the alternative associations of modernity and cosmopolitanism to the experience of the post-oil boom Gulf countries such as the modernising influence of pre-colonial Muslim Arab traders and to notions of pan-Islamic brotherhood. At the same time, Koyas are now re-evaluating their historical connections with Hadrami settlers. *Thangal* families, arriving from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, were formerly accorded religious and political leadership, but have now been substantially marginalised.

Have We Ever Been Cosmopolitan?

In Ahmedka's narrative, Koya cosmopolitanism, purged of its colonial and Hadrami 'traditionalist' influences, is linked, via the history of Arab trade, to a sense of being part of the larger Muslim world. This sense is constantly re-kindled both during public religious functions where Arab scholars are invited and through the recent experiences of Gulf migration. Koyas see themselves as more connected to the Arab world than to

other Indian Muslims, such as the *randam* and *muunum numbers* with whom they interact on a daily basis, or to the Urdu speakers from the north of the country whom Koyas explicitly associate with illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, a past characterised by forced religious conversion and a present dominated by ethnic rivalries. All these lower-status Muslims are painted as part of the world of the contemporary national vernacular (c.f. Pollock 2002), lacking the 'Arab connection'. Koyas indisputably feel themselves to be part of the *dar al Islam* (c.f. Soares 2000; Werbner 2003). At the same time, the Koyas' sense of cosmopolitanism undoubtedly reflects the business ethic of a city whose past and present history is utterly intertwined with commerce (see Barendse 1998; c.f. Das Gupta 2001; Fanselow 1996; Freitag 2003). But it is also true that although traders in Kozhikode's bazaars might belong to many different communities (though bazaars remain broadly Muslim dominated), in trade people seldom do business, in the sense of developing business ventures, across community boundaries.

While it is certainly true that some professional or trade associations, such as the Bar Council or the Chamber of Commerce, might have a wider-community support base, in practice many of these organisations may often be dominated by one group: an association of government employees may tend to be largely Hindu, an association of shopkeepers dominated by Muslims and so on. Likewise, although there are a few social organisations which have a mixed membership, such as the Rotary Club, the Round Table, the Lions Club or the (marvellously named and highly exclusive) Cosmopolitan Club, most people are more likely to be involved in their own community's organisations. And even if relationships in the workplace or schools might take place on a non-communal basis, cross-community friendships remain limited and circumscribed to public spaces: significantly, members of different communities rarely attend each other's life cycle ceremonies or celebrations, such as marriages or retirement parties. And, of course, they certainly do not marry each other (c.f. Varshney 2002).

This is most surely the case among Koyas, whose main cultural and social referent remains Thekkepuram and its *tharavadus*. Married men retain strong relations with their natal *tharavadus*, where they continue to take their noon and evening meals. Even those who have started an independent household outside the neighbourhood

take food two or three times a week in their mothers' or sisters' *tharavadu*. The sociality of Koya men revolves around Thekkepuram: every evening, after prayer, men get together in groups to exchange gossip, talk over daily political events or simply enjoy each other's company. Such groups of friends, who have often known each other since childhood, from school or are from the same or related *tharavadu*, meet every evening in the same place: a street corner; around a bench; outside someone's office. Some groups are more formal and may rent old shops to hold their daily meetings. In many groups, members take turns to organise a monthly communal meal or, during Ramzan, an *iftar* (fast-breaking) party. Thekkepuram friendships and groups are reproduced in the Gulf, where the more formalised associations will have 'branches' or 'chapters', meeting every weekend and organising fund-raising activities or 'family meets'.

If Gulf migration has led to an openness towards innovations coming from West Asia, it has also provided the basis for a withdrawal of Koyas into Muslim-dominated spaces. Inputs of Gulf money and the drive towards better education which, it is hoped, will rescue the community from dependence upon the declining bazaar and towards qualified Gulf jobs, have had significant impact upon the educational scene. In Kozhikode, local government schools generally recruit from particular residential areas; hence tend to be *de facto* segregated. In Kuttichira (Thekkepuram's central area) the government primary school is in a prevalently Muslim area and consequently the vast majority of students are Muslims from working class, non-*tharavadu* families. In the other local, but more prestigious, school (a government-aided school administered by a Muslim management committee) the student body remains predominantly Muslim, the curriculum is also designed around the all-Kerala syllabus, but the majority of the students come from low to middle class *tharavadu* Muslim families. While fifty and perhaps even twenty years ago the latter school was the preferred choice of local middle class Muslim students because the teaching of 'modern' subjects took place in an Islamic environment, nowadays, the wealthy prefer to send their children to one of the many expensive English-medium schools run by Christian management committees which offer a CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) syllabus. In sum, very few students complete their education in a 'mixed' or 'cosmopolitan' environment where they mingle with members of other communities. For many, education remains a segregated experience, with little or no

contact with non-Muslims. And with the construction of more and more private educational institutions, at all levels, education is turning into an increasingly communalised affair (c.f. Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffrey 2004).

This move, which is common in various degrees to all castes and communities in Kerala, is apparent not only in education but also in a range of other services, such as hospitals. There is an often-expressed argument that such investment is necessary in order to encourage Muslims towards development; but the corollary of these shifts is at once an impoverishment of the state sector and an increasing tendency for community closure. Communal closure does not, however, affect Koyas in the same measure: professional and business elites strive to enter into wider middle class lifestyle, moving, for example, to emerging 'cosmopolitan colonies'. But in embracing these new lifestyles and orientations, middle class Koyas do not have the same confidence as their Christian or Hindu counterparts. On the other hand, residence in Kozhikode has always been segregated community-wise. Historically, trading ports in the Indian Ocean had cosmopolitan populations living in conditions of extra-territoriality, co-operating with each other, but living separate from local population (see Pearson 1999: 13).

Koya womenfolk, meanwhile, also remain rooted strongly in the area, moving in even more tightly restricted (family based) circles. All women in this matrilineal-oriented community are strongly enmeshed in the lives of their female kin, sociality being the mainstay of Koya womenfolk's spare time. This is a daily matter in the case of *tharavadu* co-residents (and is certainly, of course, not always peaceful but often highly acrimonious), and regular in the case of more distant relations. The lanes of Thekkepuram are always busy, and utterly thronged on Fridays and Sundays, with groups of women and their kids in auto-rickshaws, going to pay visits to relatives. Women from families who have moved out of the area frequently drop by the *tharavadu*, even if it means, as it often does, an hour-long bus trip. A shopping trip for new clothes for the kids or to exchange a gold chain is always turned into a social opportunity, sometimes extended by tea or food in the family room of a restaurant.

Koyas in Thekkepuram remain, then, a closely tied and to an extent closed community: exemplarily local. Even those families who have set up independent

households in other areas tend to prefer areas already populated by Koyas, where Koya specific and Koya-exclusive forms of sociality can be reproduced and enjoyed. The degree to which such mixing takes place depends very much upon a number of highly-specific factors. In an area where there is a good mixed school, women whose children attend school together will be cordial and happily invite their children into each other's homes. But a strong Muslim presence is preferred: a woman who had recently shifted into a small new house outside Thekkepuram took Caroline into the backyard and pointed out all the neighbour's homes: "Muslim, Muslim, Hindu, Muslim, Muslim; it's a nice area." An architect in an interview affirmed that, "the first priority when choosing a location for buying land is proximity of a mosque. It goes above a good school, nearby shops, anything else." Given the requirement of five daily prayers and the increasing stress on public orthopraxy, this is, after all, reasonable, but its effect is to limit residence choices and favour closure.

Cosmopolitanism and the Gulf

We often heard the comment that 'Kozhikode used to be the Arabs' Gulf'; they came from a barren desert land to buy Indian commodities, and would be dazzled by Kozhikode's bazaar. From the 1970s, labour migration to the Gulf and post-liberalisation business opportunities have certainly increased traffic and intensified exchange while the direction of these flows has reversed, but all such connections are subsumed within a rhetoric that solely emphasises Kozhikode's long-standing relation with the Gulf.

We find strong connections between life in Kozhikode and life there. When we look at the life-cycle of a typical Muslim migrant family, we see a web of connections over time. Initially, men may go alone to the Gulf and reside with other Koyas. After marriage, a man might take his wife with him or may leave her in her own *tharavadu*, depending on finances and preference. A wife sometimes takes a visiting visa to spend a month or two with her husband; more often, women wait for menfolk to come home. Men's periods of leave and visits home range from one to six months and come at intervals of between one and five years. Women who go with their husbands to the Gulf in any case all come home and stay anything up to a year for the birth of a child. Professional men who can afford decent family housing and private schooling prefer

to shift their families out with them; but even then, women often feel isolated and find a stream of good reasons, such as a family wedding, an ailing parent or a child's education, to make prolonged visits home. Even settled families have to send their children back home for college-level education; Gulf-raised teenagers often chafe at the bit to finish their studies and get out of Kerala and back to what is for them home.

The constant traffic back and forth is not only made up of migrants going to work in the Gulf or visiting home; we have come across several Koya brides who have never lived in Thekkepuram before coming to get married. Khadeeja, 18, who had been brought up in Saudi Arabia, was happy to marry in Kerala and shift into her mother's *tharavadu*, where she had never lived; she found the stream of visitors, the rounds of dinners, shopping trips and weddings, and the throng of female company in the house exhilarating. Eventually, Khadeeja's husband may build his own house, at which time Khadeeja will move there; or perhaps the husband will, as is common, use his new Saudi Arabian connection to launch his own migrant career.

In the Gulf, in large apartment blocks (notably in Dubai, Sharjah and Kuwait) or small independent houses (in cities such as Ras al-Khaimah and Ajman), Koyas, where possible, will re-constitute groupings familiar to them from Kozhikode. If this is not possible, they will at least prefer as neighbours other Muslim migrants, such as other Muslims from Kerala, Pakistanis and so on.

Koyas' relationships with, and evaluation of, the Arab world gets considerably nuanced through the experience of actual close contact with Arabs. Inevitably, experiences are good and bad and lead them to reflect upon *dar al Islam* and ideals of Muslim brotherhood, upon the ways in which Malayali Muslims live and embody their religion, and upon Islam itself. Considerable ambivalence is of course what results. In Kuwait City, a city with strong historic trading links with Kozhikode, Filippo met up with a lively Koya community. Meeting every Thursday evening and Friday in each other's houses or on the coastal promenade, they describe themselves as a 'branch' of Thekkepuram. They are a mixed bunch: professionals, watchmen, drivers; those who have been there for more than twenty years, as well as the newly arrived (often re-locating from Saudi Arabia or Oman following the implementation of recent Arabisation policies); mature men and youngsters, the latter sometimes the

sons of Kuwait's old hands. Filippo was taken for the usual visitor's tour of the city's sprawling shopping complexes and to meet Koya shop assistants of Kozhikode origin. Comments on the exorbitant prices were interspersed with criticisms of Kuwaiti shoppers. As Mohammed Ali, a mechanical engineer, expressed, "Kuwaitis are very few and the government pays for everything. They get free electricity, free water, free housing, free education and free medical care. They have no expenses and so they have money to buy anything they want." He added, "Life is good here, I can't complain. But the Kuwaitis [...] well, they are difficult, they are too proud, like the Saudis. It is become worse since the liberation [from Iraq following the 1991 invasion]." Another friend chipped in: "these Arabs really do suffer from a superiority complex over all of us and think they are the only proper Muslims."

The following evening, Filippo's host decided to treat him to local food, taking him to one of the many open air restaurants outside the main *souq* (bazaar). They met up with Abdullah Koya, one of the oldest Koya residents in the city, who normally dresses in the 'Arab style' and speaks fluent Arabic. Sitting uncomfortably staring at the menus under the surprised gaze of Kuwaiti customers, no one knew what to order. Eventually, Abdullah called for the attention of an Egyptian waiter and ordered food for everyone. The food was eaten with great relish and, walking back to the cars, Abdullah confessed that in all the years in Kuwait none of them had dared enter an 'Arab restaurant' before. Later, they stopped outside an old mosque, one of the few remaining old buildings in Kuwait City, Abdullah called Filippo, "Look there" he said, pointing to a plaque on the side of the mosque's entrance, "it says that this mosque was built in the 1920s by Indian merchants. It must have been Koyas!" The group broke up, and Filippo got a lift home in Abdullah's car. Abdullah was a little annoyed with the others "they always complain about Kuwaitis, they say that they [Kuwaitis] are too proud. So what? Anyone with money and a luxury life will naturally be proud. When they go back to Kozhikode, they [the others in the group] are all proud!"

Now, Abdullah's sympathetic treatment of Kuwaitis is not incidental. His elder sister married a prominent Kozhikode-based Kuwaiti merchant who in the 1950s moved back with his Koya wife and children to Kuwait. After a few years, Abdullah joined them, learning Arabic and getting, through his sister's husband, a government job.

Abdullah, extremely proud of his Kuwaiti family connections, was keen to take Filippo to his brother-in-law's *diwaniya*, a private weekly gathering of related men and their friends. When they arrived, the meeting had already started: sitting around a richly furnished room and served refreshments by Malayali servants, men talked to each other in small groups. Abdullah introduced Filippo in Arabic to the men who failed to show any particular interest in the two visitors. While Abdullah settled to watch television, Filippo explained the reason for his visit to a group of older men, retired traders who had spent their youth in Bombay. Overhearing the conversation, someone from the other side of the room asked loudly, "What? Studying Keralites in India? Are there any of them left there? They are all here, you know. They come, bring all their family and want to be rich, always asking for something." Abdullah, somewhat embarrassed, stood up, signalling Filippo that it was time to go.

Back in Kozhikode, Caroline met Shameela, whose impoverished family had married her, through a broker, to an Arab twenty-five years ago when she was a girl of sixteen. Now she returns to Thekkepuram annually to stay for four months in her natal *tharavadu*. Her children are grown up and have Omani passports, Arab names and habits and have never seen their mother's homeland. While her Arab husband is happy now to allow her visits home (he long back took another wife, with whom he lives), while the children were young, he never allowed them any connection with Kerala, and Shameela did not visit home for years. Shameela speaks Malayalam with a heavy Arabic accent, wears an Arabic-style housedress and *hijab* in the house, and puts henna on the soles of her feet like Arab women. We have no way of knowing how many women like her are moving between Kerala and the Gulf, but women like Shameela are strong forces in bringing the Gulf and its commodities, clothing styles, cultural practices and food items into the intimate spaces of Kerala's women.

Kitchens' Cosmopolitan Particularism.

The food practices of Koyas display strong tendencies towards cosmopolitanism and a willing adoption of the new fashions and ideas. Having previously worked among rural Hindus, who express widespread distrust of food items felt to be imported or not traditional, who avoid commensality because of purity anxieties, and who hold strong preferences for local (*nadan*) food, even to the extent of preferring to eat rice grown

on their own land (Osella and Osella 1999), food is an arena in which we find the Koyas' openness to outside influences especially notable. Not only do Koyas accept new food influences, they seem actively to seek them out as part of their generalised interest in food, feasting and eating out.

Home-cooked trans-national dishes occasionally appear, such as the minced beef with macaroni served in some Gulf and Gulf-returned Koya homes as an exemplar of European or 'Araby' food, a notion of pasta transformed via Arab sensibilities into an index of Malayali sophistication. As Caroline compared recipes with Koya migrant women for pasta *al ragu* (original Italian version: pasta with minced beef), spaghetti Bolognese (UK version) or *macaroni* (Omani-style-Gulf-Malayali version), a non-migrant teenager marvelled. When 'tomato paste' was mentioned, she looked puzzled. Her mother in law, recently returned after 15 years in Oman, smiled triumphantly and said: "Tomato paste? Of course I know it: I am Gulf".

Koya women like her are at the forefront of culinary innovation in Kozhikode. They want to learn to cook pasta, pizza, stuffed chicken, chocolate cake and so on. Cookery classes, demonstrations and competitions are a regular feature of life both in Thekkepuram and out in the Gulf. Caroline was astounded when she attended a cookery demonstration sponsored by Nestle and attended by lower middle-class Koya women, women whose husbands may be doing low-level labour in the Gulf, or running or working in small shops in the bazaar: all of the women used Maggi ready-made noodles regularly and most of them also knew and praised Maggi prawn powder as a useful kitchen ingredient. Among Hindu and Christian communities, this level of sophistication and enthusiasm for the new is seen only among the higher classes (c.f. Caplan 1985).

Koya food itself is well-known outside the community and is highly specific. Reading descriptions of Arab food items (such as that of *harira* or *harissa* the broth made from meat, grain and milk), we have recognised several Koya items and have begun to realise the extent of Arab and Muslim influence on the culinary traditions of Koyas. In some instances, food items are clearly simply imported and simply referred to by the original Arabic names, as in the drink *cava* (Yemeni *qahwa*) which is served after *biryani* and at festive occasions, and claimed as typically Koya and Kozhikode by

Koyas. In other instances however the connections are not so obvious, but we have experienced clear equivalences through travel and taste.

Food for Koyas is tightly linked to sociality and to hospitality. The party, more properly the *salkaram* (in Thekkepuram dialect the *takkaram*) is a greatly enjoyed aspect of Koya social life, part of the Koya value of *making jolly*. At a *salkaram* there will always be the ghee rice (for which Koyas are famous) or meat stew (*biriyani*) and sometimes both; then there will be *pathiri*, both rice and wheat. Sometimes there is also fried rice and chapatti, the slightly exotic food of non-Koyas. As well as the necessary Koya food items, women also try to serve different dishes, surprise and novel, luxury or exotic foods. There will be a huge range of side dishes, at least seven; and two or more puddings; finally, two great platters, one of salad and one of cut fruit. The uncompromising non-vegetarianism of Koya food is mitigated by vast quantities of (imported) fruit. In the drive to try something new, we have recently seen the introduction of overseas-imported exotica such as lychees and kiwi fruit; and more local, but still costly and unfamiliar, items like strawberries. When unfamiliar items are offered, guests enjoy guessing what the ingredients are; there is a great sense of enjoyment and easy sociability at a *salkaram*.

The pleasure Koyas take in food exemplifies the complex braiding of influences at work in the community. While feasting and hospitality harks back to their days as hosts to Arab traders, nowadays it reinforces intra-community rather than inter-community bonds. Eating out and trying new dishes expresses simultaneously: a longstanding cosmopolitan and open orientation, also demonstrated by the vast difference in Koya dishes from the 'base' South Indian diet; an arena in which Koyas can claim distinction over less sophisticated 'others', via their awareness and demonstration of a range of 'exotic' food options; pan-Indian lower-middle-class aspirations towards global bourgeois 'lifestyle' options. Recent migration to the Gulf has intensified these processes, as visiting relatives bring items like custard powder, local supermarkets increasingly stock Gulf-imported items, *shawarma* and juice bars open up, and satellite television cookery programmes increase the culinary competence and range of those, like Koya women, sophisticated and open-minded enough to follow them.

Conclusions: Openings and Closures

While the cosmopolitanism of Koyas resonates with social theory, it does not easily fit characterisations found in recent debates (see Grillo n.d.; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). It entails an appreciation of cultural competence, of hybrid descent and of social tolerance, but also exclusion and closures, produced out of highly specific historical contingencies and practices, thus not simply an epiphenomenon of either modernity or globalisation. The cosmopolitanism of Koyas is just as much the product of the globalisation of labour (see Appadurai 1997; Clifford 1998; Hannerz 1990; or see Diouf 2002; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Werbner 1999 for non-elite variants) as it is of long term connections across the Indian Ocean (see Al-Rasheed 2004; Barendse 1998; Chaudhuri 1990; Das Gupta 2001; Kearney 2003; Parkin and Headley 2000; Pearson 2005). But in both cases the experience of living, working or trading in heterogeneous social environments is highly nuanced and contradictory. While in the Gulf, interactions across community boundaries appear to be confined to the work place and where Koya migrants replicate familiar and exclusive forms of sociality, in Kozhikode the experience of colonial and early post-independence international trade, which, unlike earlier trade connections, remains vivid in people's memories, is simultaneously deeply embedded in the identity of Koyas and, for reasons which are both political and religious, publicly muted. And in any case the two experiences, of cosmopolitanism at home and abroad, produce relationships which are qualitatively different.

Arab merchants and sailors used to roam the streets of Kozhikode and were entertained in Koya houses as guests and friends, sometimes as husbands; contemporary Gulf migrants might enter Arab houses only as servants or employees. While trans-nationalism and cosmopolitanism across the Indian Ocean are not solely twentieth century phenomena, regimes of labour circulation under contemporary global capitalism have radically transformed Koyas' everyday engagements with the wider world (c.f. Al-Rasheed 2004). And yet, Koyas are neither 'trans-nationals' who simply reconstitute the *desh* in the *bidesh* or the home overseas (Gardner 1993) nor are they comfortably straddling 'multiple cultural worlds' (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003: 361). Openings and innovations go alongside a progressive

closing of the community onto itself, an enhanced localism which nevertheless impinges on an increased sense of being part of a wider *dar al Islam*.

Islamic reformism and recent experiences of Gulf migration have intensified existing Arab-identified and Muslim-identified strands of Koya identity. Through the embrace of an Islamic and Gulf-oriented modernity and way of life, Muslims re-nourish themselves at an imagined and sentimentalised heartland of Islam. This has the effect of intensifying processes of communalisation and community closure. The need for such a turn has been reinforced by political events: locally, the emergence of strong and successful Hindu and Christian communal and caste organisations which dominate the public sphere; nationally, the state of living 'post-Ayodhya' and under the rise of Hindutva; internationally, the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions and widespread post-9/11 Islamophobia giving a sense being a 'community under siege' which needs to stick together. We also note that Koyas, and Muslims in Kerala more generally, neither present themselves as cultural hybrids, which would expose them equally to Hindutva claims that Indian Muslims are 'really' Hindu and also to accusations of religious impropriety, nor do they want to overplay an exclusive Islamic identity, a stance which would make them foreign within the nation. It is of course the totalising discourses of nationalism which make it so difficult to talk in the same breath about the indigenous roots of Koyas, cosmopolitanism and Arab influences without a negative value being put on them.

Religion, especially following reformist influences, has acquired a dominant place in the daily life of Koyas, helping migrants deal with the hardships of migration and restoring community pride back in Thekkepuram in the face of economic decline. Islam is felt to shape cultural styles across places, and offers a stable framework which connects the different parts of one's life. All those we met rely heavily upon a benevolent God who will eventually help them get good opportunities for themselves and their families and make the right decisions in life. Religion, (pace Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2003), does appear to bring about a sense of true trans-nationalism rather than mere internationalism. There is a certainly a feeling among Koyas that we know that there is something like a broader 'Muslim culture' (and equally a 'Christian culture'). They see Islamic modernity as a correct and good relationship to modernity; depending upon individual orientation, particular Gulf states are held to embody this

perfection. At the same time, the rise of religious orthopraxy has been reinforced by the success of reformist discourses. Reformists have, for example, advised Muslims against taking part in any un-Islamic practices, such as celebrating Onam [Malayali new year; see Osella and Osella 2000b] or Christmas with their non-Muslim neighbours; or taking part in public events with a ‘Hindu flavour’, such as lighting lamps onstage at inaugurations. Reformist critiques have accelerated recognition among Muslims that Kerala’s secularist public sphere is in fact strongly marked as Hindu. Relationships between communities are being reformulated as ‘unity in diversity’, under the protection of a secular state which guarantees the rights of religious minorities.

The ways in which Koyas of Kozhikode render their home city and their own lives, histories and identities, is often through references to highly-specific places and to a braided culture which is at once particularistic and supra-local. Under discussion are not empirical locations but imaginary zones which exaggerate perceived negative and positive characteristics. In practice, of course, places are actually tightly linked, and resist clear lines being drawn between what is *nadan* [local] and what is *foren* [foreign]. The inter-penetration and co-presence of the local and the foreign – in the case of Kozhikode and the Gulf, something which is extremely intense – also needs to be taken properly into account. As we have seen, the Gulf is hardly alien at all in Kerala. Apart from the ubiquity of households with migrant members, shops such as ‘Gulf Bazaar’, selling imported items, and pavement cafés such as ‘Hot Buns’ chicken *shawarma* bar are all part of the landscape. Muslim children begin to learn Arabic script as soon as they learn Malayalam or English, and all Muslims we meet in Kozhikode have some familiarity, sometimes a high competence, in Arabic language. Many television sets in Kerala receive not only local channels but also satellite channels such as Asianet Gulf, which is targeted at Gulf Malayalis and broadcasts daily news on Malayali life and social events in the Gulf. We feel that because of the intensity of the linkages, the frequency and ease of traffic back and forth, and the interpenetration of Gulf and Kerala, that the Gulf is actually part of Kerala, and not at all a separate *nadu*.

Turning to consider relationships between local and supra-local which then make up both cosmopolitanism and Kozhikode’s own particular connection into global

networks, we find that Koyas have both a strong local orientation, but that this is shot through with a sense of cosmopolitanism coming from both wider Islam and from the specific links to the Gulf. But we must not (pace Tsing 2002) think that ‘local’ and ‘global’ are pitted against each other, or that ‘local’ necessarily means vernacular, non cosmopolitan. There is an extremely specific and exclusivist Koya identity, which is heavily dependent upon the right to claim roots in a particular bounded locality, Thekkepuram, and a set of cultural practices revolving around the *tharavadu* system, food, and sociality. But that highly specific and exclusive identity itself is recognised to be an outcome of wider links. It is prized as a historic product of cosmopolitanism itself: of descent from or meetings with Arabs; of a recent willingness to move into the mainstream of education; of a cultural sophistication which is open to innovation.

This sense of cosmopolitanism among Koyas is contrasted with those who lack these characteristics: the poor who cannot afford to go to the Gulf and who can claim no direct Arab descent or connection; the rural folk who lack access to Kozhikode’s commercial and seafaring past with its rich commodities and contacts with Arabs; Muslims from North Indian who are stuck with a specific language marking them off from others and with an uneducated worldview which makes them prone to violence and prey to manipulation by communal-minded forces. Concluding, then, we take Koyas as embodying a highly particularistic cosmopolitan localism, in which the local extends to encompass the Gulf Arab world. This very specific and bounded Koya culture is made up of many strands from the sedimented past and contemporary experience: in all of this, encounters with Gulf Arabs are right at the heart of what it means to be a Koya.

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