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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## N.P. Mohamed's The Eye of God: A Personal Narrative as well as a Socio-Cultural Document, the Distinctive life-style of the Mappillas of Kerala

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### Abstract

This paper analyzed the N.P. Mohamed's The Eye of God. It was originally written in the Malayalam; Gita Krishnakutty translated it into English. His fiction is rooted in his own community that of the Malayali Muslims or Mappillas of Kerala, one of the most distinctive cultural groups in the state. He prefers to speak of his community as "Muslim Malayallis", the Muslim traders who came to the Kerala coast; they did not bring any women with them and married local women belonging to the regions they settled. It is a personal narrative as well as a socio-cultural document highlighting the distinctive life-style of the Mappillas, it narrates the story of an unscrupulous man consumed by a blind greed for the wealth. The child is a narrator of the novel, he is observer and participant. The child narrator looks up at the sky and realizes that the sun is the eye of God and that it watches everything that takes place. He feels that the eye reddens for fully when human beings do wrong and the God is angry with them. Mariam Ammayi, the head of the joint matrimonial family in the story, she makes repeated efforts to save her nephew. Her brother Koyssan is driven solely by greed for a wealth. The innocent child is a protagonist, is trapped in the fearful drama and becomes the terrified witness of his own thought end.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Eye of God is the Malayalam novel written by a famous novelist N.P. Mohamed. Gita Krishnakutty translated it into English; she was born in Madras, taught French at Alliance Françoise College and has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Mysore, Mysore. She has translated short stories and novels from Malayalam. N.P. Mohamed was born in the village of Parappanagadi, Kerala. He published his first collection of short stories at the age of twenty-two. He has been the author nine volumes of short stories, six novels, four critical studies, a travelogue and three books for children. He has won several literary awards and was till recently the Resident editor of Kerala Kaumudi. His fiction is rooted in his own community that of the Malayali Muslims or Mappillas of Kerala, one of the most distinctive cultural groups in the state. He prefers to speak of his community as "Muslim Malayallis", the Muslim traders who came to the Kerala coast; they did not bring any women with them and married local women belonging to the regions they settled. They have two traditions, the maternal side they imbibed the Hindu customs and manners, making certain variations to accommodate the newly accepted religious faith, and on the paternal side the Muslim faith, predominantly a local variation of it. Many settlers in the Malabar region, they copied the life style of the common folk and became agricultural labourers they adopted local customs, one who settled in urban, they adopted the maternal system of inheritance, by which property was handed down through women. They have their own language, dresses, music and songs, children were taught the Quran through rote memorization and recitation, they adopted the life and teaching of prophet, Mappilla songs composed and articulate in several special

occasions like weddings and religion functions, these different kinds' songs are now very popular and well known all over Kerala. The religious education has always been an integral part of the Mappilla life and virtually all Mappilla children went to the Madrasa, which functioned either as a purely religion school and worked before or offer regular government school homes.

The Eye of God (Deivathinte Kannu) is a Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel. It is a personal narrative as well as a socio-cultural document highlighting the distinctive life-style of the Mappillas, it narrates the story of an unscrupulous man consumed by a blind greed for the wealth. The child is a narrator of the novel, he is observer and participant. The child narrator looks up at the sky and realizes that the sun is the eye of God and that it watches everything that takes place. He feels that the eye reddens for fully when human beings do wrong and the God is angry with them. Mariam Ammayi, the head of the joint matrimonial family in the story, she makes repeated efforts to save her nephew. Her brother Koyssan is driven solely by greed for a wealth. The innocent child is a protagonist, is trapped in the fearful drama and becomes the terrified witness of his own thought end. It also narrates Mappilla's rituals associated with the black magic, episodes, sexual seduces. The woman of the family is the custodian of the goodness and justice. None of them is susceptible to averse and although they are very different one another, they are completely united in their love for the child protagonist. N.P. Mohamed creates a host of lesser characters bring alive an intricate Microcosm of village life, of its rigidly caste conscious society whose different levels the child can only guess at from the names adults use to demarcate them; its thralldom to superstition and sorcery, where caste barriers are blurred and the basic instincts of fear and desire takes over; its feasts and festivals and its constant, close bond with the land.

Ahmed was narrator of the novel; he was a small boy in Mariam Ammayi's family. He is studying in 5<sup>th</sup> standard, innocent, matured simple boy. He is always afraid of the Moothappa, a brother of Ammayi and he runs a tea shop. In Kerala Mappilla community female is the head of the family, everything is controlled by her and everything brings out to her notice. Ahmed was happy when he was in Kozhikode but he was not happy when he was in Parappanagadi, Moothappa took him to get a head shave to Ibrahim Ossen. He shaved his head, his knife repeatedly; move over his head to make it very smooth. He did not care that the blood splattered his scalp. This act has taken against his will, he felt very irritated. Umma was Ammayi's eldest daughter, she did not have a father and she had never seen him. His mother, father, and sister Ayiseyi had moved to Parappanangadi, he was great love of nature and train. He expresses his aim, "I told Boppa that night that I wanted to become a train man" (Mohamed 3). Umma is a daughter of Ammayi and good friend of Ahmed. There Malayali Mappillas were strongly believed that they could see Mecca and Medina, if they climbed the mango tree, they could see Mecca and Medina but could not see the Prophet Mohammed's tomb. There was a hierarchy in the society; they could not touch Thupron, who is a low caste man. Parappanangadi's house has a big compound; snakes are very common because it is a coastal region. They strongly believed that snakes were not harmful. Umma is a good girl, she likes him and she puts her arm around him and kisses him. The Mappillas community strongly believed in blind belief that their forefathers buried valuable goods in their compound. When this child asked about the snakes Umma said, "The snakes have a reason for wondering about here. Our forefathers buried treasure in the compound gold and silver coins, gold bangles, chains, anklets waist chains and nuggets of gold. There good snakes were appointed guardians" (Mohamed 7). We should not kill the snakes, if snakes permits us, we will get treasure and enjoy the treasure and become kings and queens. There was a child marriage system in this community, Umma has completed the fifth class and was waiting to get marriage. They put strong faith in religion, whenever a person passed away the Musaliyar children from the Panathil Mosque to chant the Mowlod, the story of prophet. They performed some rituals, when Ayisa Ammayi has passed away. Moymmadali was an elder person in the family, he was very active but now he stood in the centre of the outhouse clanking his chains. He was naked, a piece of seeking had been tried graced him to cover his genitals but he had torn it into shreds. His hair was matted, his beard and moustache overgrown and who was tied with iron chained.

The Mappilla community strongly believed in evil spirit and the black magic. . Koyassa is a brother of Mariama Ammayi he scolded him; he rushed to the bamboo thicket holding a stick covered with thorns and leaves. He sprang towards Moymmadali and thrashed him aiming his blow forcefully but Moymmadali would get Moothappa by his neck, Moothappa controlled at himself and grew frenzied. Ammayi requested him that does not beat him, he is a human being but Moothappa said, "This is not human strength that he has. It's the strength of the evil spirits. Don't you know there are three of them inside him?" (Mohamed 11). Thupran and Moothappa dragged him and chinned. Moymmadali was fine; he had been like all of us once. He used to go regularly to the mosque to pray the God to Allassan Mollakka's religious school; he learned an Arabic script. During the Monsoon in the month of May he finds enormous mushroom in the bamboo thicket, there are two types of Mushroom one is good and another one is poisoned. The poisonous ones are pretty there are little circular design between the open petals, he ate the poisoned mushroom. Next day his lips being slack and he could not follow him when he spoke, his

speech was slurred and the words were meaningless. They consulted Raman Vaidyar, he prescribed some medicine but could not effect. Moothappa brought a Panikkar, an astrologer, he performed a pooja and found out the wrong. He sat cross legged and prayed and calculated something, he aided and subtracting figures, “He discovered that the spirit had coveted the mushroom that Moymmadali had eaten, he said, “The spirits had tried the snatch in from Ikkakkaa, but he had already eaten it. There were three spirits. They got into Ikkakka’s throat. When they came down to his stomach Ikkakka began to throw up. The Medicine and mantrams made the spirits restless so they climbed into his head” (Mohamed 14). He performed homa to drive the spirits away, he had bath and prayed and chanted mantrams. Moymmodali sat obediently in front of him with cross legged. But that could not workout properly and he commented to drive the spirit out of him. Moothappa sacrificed a rooster. Ahmed was more intimation with Ummoo, he was Moothappa’s younger brother’s son Ummoo lay with her arms around him, and he wanted to listen to the rain’s song. Abdu was Ahmed’s father. Ahmed was friend of Moothappa, he was like a fire and he may burn people at anytime.

The child marriage was practicing in the Mappilla community; Ummoo’s marriage was fixed at the age of 12. She liked Ahmed, she kissed on his forehead. They strongly believed in the supernatural elements when the boy asked Ummoo about her, she said, “Ummoo has come of age. It’s now that spirits came hunting girls. If a spirit catches hold of Ummoo, she will become crazy like Moymmadali Ikkakke. She’ll be a madwoman” (Mohamed 43). She narrates many stories about the village and her family, Ahmed was very innocent; Ummoo’s marriage was fixed with a man from Kochi. Ummoo asked him, “Will you come to see me in Kochi?, he could not reply anything but his eyes were filled with tears. Ummoo’s marriage was over; her husband was waiting outside of the house. She walked behind her husband, Aliyan Ikka, Ummoo and Moothappa were on the other side of the road.

The Mappillan were attending a religious schools, Ahmed joined to Panthil mosque. The night school was full of the Musaliyar children and scholars; they were doing higher religious studies. Kumhalu Musaliyar was his teacher. He could not recite the Quran, he did not know of its meaning. His Bappa did not like to send him to Panthil night school; he did not like to go to night school. They forced him to become a Madaris and teach religious aspects but boy has his own dream, he expresses “I did not want to become Madaris. I wanted to be the man in the train who asked the tickets” (Mohammed 56). He was neglected in the house, Moothappa was very cruel and dominant but he controlled the whole house. Nafeesu Thatha was his Athan Elappa’s stepdaughter, he was very eager to see her again. She was very smart, Moothappa hated Nafeesu Thatha, he mattered,” The bitch should not let the likes of her into the house. Her husband left her because she could not keep her mouth shut. He is in Rangoon now, doing excellent business in a five roomed shop” (Mohamed 61). Some festival days everyone was busy to prepare food to carry mosque. There was a tragedy happened in the house, there was a big vessel on the fire place had been overturned, the curry was spitted all over the ground and pieces of meat were scattered everywhere. Moymmadali Ikkakka took a piece of meat into his mouth chewing them and spitted them out. But Moothappa was so angry; he kicked on his stomach and he screamed. Ammayi requested him, “You know it’s because he is not right in the head” (Mohamed 63). Moothappa was very cruel; he pulled Moyammadali from the foundation of the unfinished house to the ground, caught his hands and dragged him away. Women stood like wooden stumps in the dark, everyone looked at him fearfully. He was so cruel Ammayi cannot tolerate she spoke, “we will make some more curry quickly Koyassa, don’t panic and behave like a devil that seen burning incense” (Mohamed 64), his mother opened the store room and brought masala powder and prepared curry.

He killed Moymmadali Ikkakka. Ammayi was always in the kitchen, she was running her fingers through her hair and searching for something. One day Moothappa was so angry, he curled his fists and took a step forward to kill her but she opposed him, “so Koyassa, you are not satisfied with killing one of us? Here kill me as well them” (Mohamed 68). Umma rescued Ammayi. The Mappillas community was expert in the black magic and they strongly believed in the supernatural elements. When Moothappa grows cruel and most dangerous, Ammayi suspected and wrote a letter to her daughter, “I trust you are keeping really well her. I pray to Allah for you five times a day. I am sure there are good Musaliyars there. You must get a vasi from one of them and drink it morning and evening. Then you and the child will be fine. Let me know if here are no good Musaliyars there. I will get Kunharu Musaliyar to make a talisman and send it to you. All of us are well” (Mohamed 69). She was afraid of activities of Moothappa. She painfully speaks, “We have only the flower left now among the males. If he goes, the Narakampura tarawad will be destroyed. King of Kings, Almighty Malikkal Jabbar, please forgive the great sin my younger brother Keyasson committed unknowingly” (Mohamed 71). Ammayi cupped her palm against her chest and prayed the god.

Ahmed passed the fifth class with the first rank, Ayiseyi was promoted to the third class but Moothappa was not happy. He joined to Mission School. Moothappa was running a shop at Anjappura, it was crowded. When he was studying in the 6<sup>th</sup> standard, he had two good friends like Ramakrishna Gopinath. Mappilla were not cleaned, they joined to school rarely. Gopinath asked many questions, “He was full of questions. Did a Mappilla boy have a

bath every day? Did a Mapilla boy change cloths every day? Was buffalo meat what Mappilla boys” (Mohamed 75). He was very active in the school, teacher wrote the names of all five leaders on the board Ramakrishna, Damodaran, Krishnakutty, Kunhikannam and Ahmed. Marry was a good teacher, he had a good handwriting. It was a christen school, they taught the Bible, he read some portion and closed it. They had to follow the Bible. There was strictly follow the Christianity in the school. They had a Bible classes as well, Eddic Master taught them the Gospel accordingly to St. Mathew. Adam was the first man, Eve the first woman, God made Eve from Adam’s rib. He made them husband and wife, the god loved them. He created the snakes; the question is why he created snake. Teacher told many moral stories.

The Mappillas were strongly believed in the existence of the God and Goddess. He is teacher Kunharu Musaliyar Ustad narrated many stories about the God, “The Sun is the Eye of the god. I know I am right in saying this. Allahu appointed angles to make the thunder rumble, to guard. Hell and Heaven. And so, to find out what was happening on earth, Allahu told the Sun to” (Mohamed 86-87). Moothappa had plotted to kill Ahmed and he was waiting an opportunity to kill him. The Mappillas community strongly believed in the spirit, evil spirit and black magic. Moothappa brought Musaliyar, he told that Moymmadali, whom the spirits had betrayed. His body was being buried, there was a terrible sound. It was sounded of the horned spirits leaping out of Ikkakka’s skull. Those spirits hid in the bushes in the yard of the Mosque waiting for their chance. Those spirits reached your house. They went straight to the outhouse became it was empty. He said, “The spirits would harm you only if you did something against them” (Mohamed 89). There are three spirits, they talked something and there are two types of snakes good and bad.

N.P. Mohammed’s The Eye of God narrates the culture of the Mappillas. There was festival of the Kaliyottu Bhagvathi temple and they would sacrifice a rooster. The procession usually started at Naha’s bungalow. Ahmed was swimming in the Kuthira river, Kunhahmed master called him. He took him to his house, when they reached home Moothappa talked of something quite differently, “Mayi, give him a bath and bring him quickly. There’s something I want him to do” (Mohamed 94). His mother took him to the bathing tank, he got bath. Ahmed saw peacock feather all over the floor and feather of hundred and one birds. Mohamed narrates innocent child’s mind, “I wanted a peacock feather to keep inside my book. If you put a feather in my book, it would turn into two feathers. But you need to be careful no one saw it. I would not show it to anyone” (Mohamed 96). His mother was worrying about his son. She had tied a thread around its neck and hanged it up on a doornail.

N.P. Mohamed narrates the customs and rituals of the Mappillan. Moothappa is an unscrupulous man, he wanted consumed by a blind greed for wealth. One day Moothappa brings Karappan Sivayi Devu and Kanakkan Thamie to do some calculation. He wears different dress, he puts U letter on his forehead. They believed in the calculations, the calculations are being made in order to control the spirits and the spirits afraid of calculations. If the spirits are subdued, the bad snake can be subdued as well snakes were the servants of the spirits. Ahmed asked about the calculation, Nafeesu Thatha said, “The spirits have been running wild here ever since Moymmadali Ikkakka died. They no longer have a resting place, and are looking for a healthy flowering plant, a male child” (Mohammed 110). Nafeesu began to kiss him over and over again her gentle warmth of her breath was on his face and her breasts rubbed him. Kanakkan was chanting mantrams inside, mantrams made the spirit suffer. The door was closed; he could hear sounds inside, some people chanting the Quran. The innocent boy was playing in the compound. All the spirits lived under the ground, Kanakkan Tham’s mantrams would drive the spirit into the ground and dash against the spirit’s horns. Everything important takes place under the ground, the burnt spirits are in a death agony and they open out their wings and fly beneath the ground. The eye of the god looked red against the stained sky; the sun was a glowing drop of blood.

N.P. Mohamed narrates the sentimental feeling and attachment of son and Mother, Ahmed’s mother did not allow him to walk. She would not allow his feet to touch the ground and he laughed himself. Moothappa ordered Ammayi that, “I am going to for prayers. Don’t let him go out in the dusk. Don’t lose sight of him. The spirits came out and drunkard” (Mohamed 116). They started performing a ritual, Moothappa held the child tightly. Moothappa put him down in front of Thami, he chanted something. He could not breathe properly, his heart was beating loudly. They were torturing him, Thami picked up the skull and he circled it around his seven times. He asked number of question to a boy, he replied and the ritual ended. Moothappa unscrupulous, he was greedy for wealth, he took crowbar digging the ground. Ammayi was finding fault with Moothappa, she accused Umma and Nafessu Thatha of obeying Moothappa and she was furious. She was shouting but there was a dead silent. Ammayi was very strong, “Ammayi would be a man, Ammayi always talked loudly, waving her arms, A black mustache would suit her. She would take very good” (Mohammed 124). The wood cutters were busy but she scolded them, she defended that “I am the senior most member of the Narakampura family. Do you understand?” (Mohamed 125) she ordered them not to cut the mango trees. Moothappa came with an axe, he was crumpled. He defended himself that Kanakkan advised me that spirits were living on the mango tree, to drive the spirits away; he ordered to cut

down trees. But she knew that “To get at the treasure” (Mahamed 127). They were strongly believed in the super nature elements, she screamed with laughter, “The spirits guards the treasure. The snakes helped them to do so. If the spirits did not go away, there would be no peace in the house. If the spirits went, away we could take the treasure for ourselves. It did not seem a bad idea” (Mohamed 128). Ammayi was indifferent, she held him and she burned with emotion. Her breast raised and fall, a teardrop fell on her chest and she screamed, “Koyassa, don’t you want treasure? Kill this tender creates and give the its blood. Hence you are, kill him quickly.. kill him” (Mohamed 133) and Ammayi pushed him towards Moothappa. Ammayi and Thatha were caught his horse and tied it up. He cried loudly, “Treacherous enemies, let me go. If you don’t let me go, I will not think of you as my Ammayi and my Thatha. I will kill you” (Mohamed 143). Ammayi griped him but loosened and Thatha would not let him go and she held him tightly. He could not escape from the wicked hands. His mother could not protect her son, they tied chain around his feet. Ahmed cried with full of tears, “I am coming. Let me take off this chain they have tied on my feet. Umma I want to lie pressed to your breast. I want to sleep on you breast. I want to sleep soundly” (Mohamed 144). He could not escape from the clutch from wicked women. It is quite common in the Mappillas community. The innocent child protagonist is trapped in this fearful drama and became the terrified witness of his own tragic end.

### **Works Cited**

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