

Gulf Migration and Development of Malabar: Re-visiting the Development of Malabar and Muslims

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Abstract

State of Kerala and its unique development model has been deliberated in the world development literature for more than past three decades. Three regions, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar share the regional space of the state of Kerala, each has its own historical-socio-economic, political and developmental trajectory. Out of three, Malabar is characterized by its regional backwardness and Muslim population concentration of the state. Malabar has been mostly attached with backwardness, exploitative land-relations, peasant uprisings and backward Muslims in the main stream academic discourses. For the state of Kerala and the region of Malabar it has been decades of migration now, Migration of its working population to Gulf countries, It has impacted in the economy and society of Kerala in general and Malabar in particular. There is a euphoria created in the academic and intellectual public sphere of Kerala that, post Gulf migration era has been of the Muslims in the state. It is hypothesised in the public consciousness that the Muslims of the state have shown higher development in this particular phase, big two story houses with luxurious facilities and most expensive vehicles as well as the other symbols of luxuries have started to be seen with Muslims now.

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This paper is looking at some of the socio-economic indicators and secondary data sets to argue that Muslims as a homogeneous community of the state of Kerala who are located in the Malabar region in particular still remains as one of the most socio and economically backward population than even Scheduled Caste communities of the state and counter argues the mainstream public consciousness attached to the Muslims as one of the fastest developing society and Malabar, the region in the state.

Key words: Kerala, Muslims, Malabar and Development

Muslims in India are one of the socio economically under developed communities which also bear other marginalities and vulnerabilities of an extremely marginalized community. The debates and discourses on their development even in the Indian academia was comparatively a later and recent exercise, reasons for the same are diverse. However, after the publication of the Prime ministers high level committee appointed to inquire the socio economic and educational status of Indian Muslims called as Sachar Committee in 2006, the findings of this particular committee paved way for the discussions on the comparative developmental deficit of Indian Muslims in an unprecedented manner. It notes that Muslims in India are not a homogeneous community and the categories within it suffer a lot of issues as well as they are one of the weakest performers in the socio-economic and development indicators where they are even worse than the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes of this country in some indicators (Sachar Commission Report-2006). Apart from giving a clear picture of the status of Muslims as a whole it also looks into the different states where there is considerable Muslim population and obviously deliberations on Muslims of the state of Kerala also comes there. However one has to also note that how state of Kerala and the Muslims of this state have been highlighted as one of the comparatively better performing category throughout the same report would get an impression that Muslims here are not as excluded and marginalized than many of the other states as well as they are one of the better performing category. Here is the relevance of looking at some of the socio-economic and other indications of the Muslims of Kerala and compare it with the rest of the Kerala society. As state of Kerala has had a different history of development experience from rest of the country, some of its basic development indicators were even higher to compare with the developed world without a very high economic growth. This was highlighted as the famous Kerala model of development in the development literature and discourses. The human

development of the state of Kerala has to take its history into consideration. The process of development was shaped in the three regions differently because of the peculiarities and historical context of the three regions. The biggest achievement of the so called Kerala model was argued that, it was possible to achieve remarkably high levels of human development without a substantial economic growth. This model was criticized on the ground of many reasons and arguments later; regional disparity of the three regions within the state of Kerala was argued as one of the relevant criticism against the Kerala model discourse, where Malabar was highlighted of the backward region in comparison with the other two. Considering the pre-unification of the state and historical reasons, it shows why Malabar was at the bottom of socio-economic development as compared to the other two. So it has already been established that Malabar is an underdeveloped analytical category.

Malabar as an underdeveloped category

Let me here throw some light on the regional history and developmental disparity of three regions. Travancore, Cochin and Malabar share the regional space of the state of Kerala, each has its own historical socio-economic and developmental trajectory. Out of three, Malabar region is characterized by its regional backwardness and Muslim population concentration of the state. There is agreement and disagreement among the historians that north Kerala, the Malabar Coast was connected to rest of the world, especially to Arabia, even before Islam took birth in Arabia. Thereafter Islam came to this part through the Arab traders and preachers who came to India, Malabar originally was the district under the Madras presidency during British era. It was the only one region which was directly under the control of British rule, including northern half of the present day Kerala and some coastal region of present Karnataka state. After the unification of Kerala as a state in 1956, the northern region of present day Kerala was, that is, Kasargode, Kannur, Malappuram, Wayanadu and Kozikoodu districts, were known as the Malabar region within the state of Kerala. Malabar is underdeveloped in terms of health, education, per capita income, employment and other indicators of socio economic development. For example, according to Kerala Development Report in 1901, Malabar had only 25 medical institutions and the number of hospital beds per 100,000 persons was as low as 15, Even in 1956-57, the number of hospital beds per 100,000 persons in Malabar was only 34, a position reached by Travancore 60 years earlier (1896-97). Cochin fared better than Malabar. By 1909, Cochin had 33 hospital beds per 100,000 persons and 17 allopathic medical institutions, or 1 medical institution per 108 square miles. by 1902-03, the combined expenditure of the provincial and local bodies in Malabar on health care and

education stood at barely 40 and 78 per cent, respectively, of the corresponding figures for Travancore, while the population of Malabar was nearly 95 per cent of that in Travancore (Kerala Development Report-2005). By 1902 there were 1094 recognized schools which caters to 71,677 students under the department of education. Considering all the schools (Government, aided and unaided), the population to school ratio in Malabar was 1,641 vis-à-vis 801 in Travancore. The literacy rate in the Malabar during 1901 was around 10 per cent as compared to 12.4 per cent in Travancore and 13.4 per cent in Cochin and this gap has further widened in the following decades. The vast majority of the people here were prevented by abject poverty from sending their children to schools. The phase of the social change that Travancore witnessed had its reverberations in Cochin and only a small extent in Malabar. The very many handicaps that Malabar experienced under direct British rule, in particular the prevailing agrarian structure and the social relations that it gave birth to, caused it to lag behind the two princely territories. Those have more or less existed even after many years of unification of the territories as state of Kerala. The scholarship on Malabar and its development had argued some reasons why this particular region has lagged behind the other two. Interestingly it was always the direct rule of British in the Malabar district, with some other small reasons.

Muslims of Kerala

State of Kerala accounts for the 25.5 per cent of Muslims as one of the biggest population concentration among the Indian states after the state of Assam¹. Muslims of Kerala have entirely different narrative of history and development than Muslims anywhere else in India. Historians have pointed out that Malabar (North Kerala) had trade contacts with the Arab lands even before 3000 BC (Pillai-1940). Arabs came for trade, settled and married the women of the region and preached Islam in the coastal regions of Malabar. Most of the untouchables were attracted to the religion as there was rampant caste system. This was the beginning of the Muslim society in this part of the country. Today, Muslims in Kerala constitute about a quarter population of the state's total population (24.7¹). Unlike the Muslims of the other Indian states, Muslims of Kerala have a comparatively, though not very substantial, higher socio-economic and educational development. This is reflected in various indicators of socio economic development of the Muslims in the state. This also has been seen in the general human development achievements of the state of Kerala (Yoginder, 2007).

However, one must also understand that Muslims in Kerala relatively have better socio-economic condition in comparison to their other counterparts but this is not the complete picture. In comparison with the Hindu and Christian populations in Kerala, the Muslims are backward in terms of education levels, literacy and other general development indicators². The Sachar Committee observes that, while Muslim constitutes 24.7 percent of the total population they constitute 30.7 per cent of the total poor (BPL) in Kerala. Their share under the various Government programmes ranges between 5 per cent and 18 per cent, except in programmes like Co-operative Credit (25%), National Tuberculosis Control Programme (28%) and National Programme for Control of Blindness (21 %). The share of Muslims is less than 12 % in the schemes implemented by Rural Development and Housing Departments³. It is evident that the Muslim representation in the below poverty percentage is more than the total share of their population in the state. Their representation in the government services employment is 11.4 which is less than half of their total population percentage and which less than the share of states SC is and ST population representation in the public sector employments⁴. This also gives indications to the educational backwardness, which I will discuss in the later part of the paper. This is the general condition of the Muslims in Kerala who enjoy a relatively better position than their counterparts in different parts of India. The 1970s saw the beginning of the huge migration from the state from all different section of populations. This got accelerated during 1980s and to this date the trend continues even today though there have been the chaos of *Nitaqat* law introduced in Saudi Arabia and other increasing emigration restrictions for the less and unskilled workers in Gulf region. The earlier studies on the huge migration in general provided some valid reasons for this trend including the historical connection with the Middle East in trade and commerce, the Islamic connection of Malabar with the Arab lands, and the ethnic connections (Josep, 2001). The attractive wage rate that migrants could get in these countries was an important factor and at the same time, these earlier studies have not taken into cognizance that there has been poverty and rampant unemployment in the region, especially in Malabar. The earlier studies that came up on the Gulf migration from the state were found on some of the primary learnings. According to Nair's study, there is preponderance in the number of Muslims among the return migrants, which can be seen as the reflective fact that they dominate in the number of

emigrant workers to the Middle East. At the same time the general education level of the emigrants from the Muslim community was lowest; it was higher for Hindus and highest for the Christians. The same study looked at the proportion of the people who have at least the levels of education up to matriculation and higher qualified persons and it showed that about 71 percent among the Christians, 37 percent among Hindus and for Muslims it was merely 16 per cent. It is clearly evident that in terms of the number of migrants, in terms of religion, Muslims were the highest; at the same time they were also educationally backward as compared to the Christians and Hindus emigrants from Kerala.

Migration to Gulf from Kerala

Migration to West Asian countries especially to the Gulf countries has been one of the most significant phase for economy and society for the state of Kerala. State has been in the forefront of sending laborers to the Gulf countries for the last three decades. The impact of this huge migration of labor from the state and their remittances has been the backbone of the state's economy. It has changed the face of the state in almost all walks of life. According to the first Kerala migration study, there are 1.5 million Keralites living outside India and they sent more than Rs. 4,000 million a year by way of remittances and three-quarters of a million former emigrants have come back. The most recent available estimates of the emigrants to Gulf from the state of Kerala shows that out of the 668,876 international migrants, 641,387 migrants in the gulf countries. It accounted for the 95.89 per cent of international migrants significantly, 94.8 per cent of the migrants were males. It has been about three decades now, when the massive labor migration started from the state. There are some micro studies as well as that of State Economics and Statistics Department and the series of migration surveys conducted by the Center for Development Studies, Trivandram. I would discuss some of the factors which are important for the Muslim community in Kerala. According to first migration survey in Kerala, Muslims received 47 percent of the total remittance, Ezahaws and Syrian Christians each had received about 13 percent, Latin Christians received 11 percent and Nairs about 9 percent. However, one of the most crucial aspects to note is that the Muslim households did not receive the highest per emigrant remittances. An average Latin Christian emigrant sent back Rs 33 thousand per year and an average Syrian Christian emigrant Rs 27 thousand. In contrast, the average remittance per Muslim emigrant was Rs 24 thousand only. This is an important indicator to assess the low level of education, unskilled nature of job or the less wage jobs taken by the Muslim migrants. This variation in remittance is based on the educational level and opportunities to work in relatively high paid jobs. The remittance for an

average degree-holding emigrant was Rs. 20 thousand. This was another indicator showing the lack of education and less probability of getting a decent paid job for Muslim migrants as compared to the migrants from other communities. According to the 2001 Census, 56.3 percent of the Kerala's population is Hindu, 19 percent Christians and 24.7 per cent is Muslim. However Muslims constitute 41.1 percent of the emigrants, followed by 37.7 percent of Hindus and 21.2 percent of Christians. Table 1 explains the population percentage of migrants of different religious populations from 1998 to 2008 with percentage distribution of migrants and migrants per household. The major highlights of the table includes: Muslims constitutes the majority in terms of the number of emigrants. At the same time, it is important to note the volume of remittance received by the different household in-accordance with their religion.

Table 1: Percent distribution of emigrants according to religion

| Religion | Percentage of the total population | Percent Distribution | | | Emigrants per households | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|----------------------|------|------|--------------------------|------|
| | | 1998 | 2003 | 2008 | 2003 | 2008 |
| Hindu | 56.2 | 29.5 | 31.2 | 37.7 | 14.6 | 18.7 |
| Christian | 19.0 | 19.8 | 35.1 | 21.2 | 31.4 | 29.9 |
| Muslim | 24.7 | 50.7 | 43.7 | 41.1 | 61.1 | 56.4 |

Source: Kerala migration survey, Center for Development Studies.

It is evident that, the Muslim families were the recipients of the high percentage of total remittances. It is important to understand the correlation in receipts of remittances and Muslim population that lived below the poverty line. It is interesting to see that migration has contributed to poverty alleviation than any other factors in the state. The remittance sent by the emigrant to the family has double fold impact. It alleviates poverty and improves standard of life. Firstly the impact of the remittance benefits directly to the family and its members. Secondly the spill-over impact includes increase in the demand of consumer durables that leads to increased wages and employment and increase in price of the land. Migration has had very significant impact on the population who live below the poverty line in Kerala. The total BPL population of Kerala has declined from 53 percent in 1977-78 to 32 percent in 1987-88 (Planning Commission-1993). This is the same period of acceleration of the migration and remittances. At the same time it is crucial to note that the full credit for poverty alleviation

could not be given to the Gulf migration and remittance (Prakash-1998). State of Kerala was not poverty less state at any point of time, poverty levels of this state was even equivalent to some of the worst performing north Indian states. Overall poverty in the state has marked a declining trend during 1990s because of many factors including the effects of various social-economic security programmes and subsequent institutionalization of those measures (Kerala Development Report, 2005). The decline in poverty was largest among the Muslims that is about six percent and it was relatively high among the Ezhavas (Mathew, Zackariah and Rajan-2000). The Ezhava community is one of the most mobile populations of the state. At the same time the poverty level of the Muslims was indeed higher than them. Broadly, migration to Gulf has contributed to alleviate poverty and reduce the number of people living below the poverty line. It is interesting to note that during the same period of time, parts of Kerala that have seen considerable decline in the level of poverty level seem to have large population of Muslim community. The Gulf migration and subsequent inflow of remittances enabled this phenomenon largely. The Gulf migration played a significant role in bringing change in the lives of Muslims in Kerala. It is imperative to note all the nuances of gulf migration, inflow of remittances in Kerala and its subsequent impacts for the Muslims population.

Education and Employment

Educational development is one of the crucial factor for the overall all development of any society, Muslims in general have shown a slow growth in terms of modern educational attainment and educational development in India. Muslims have also benefited from the total literacy campaign and other literacy achievements of the state. However, one has to see further how far they have achieved the literacy levels. The enrollment in schools was only 42.5% of school-age Muslim boys and 23.3% of girls in 1940s. A commission appointed to see the educational situation of the state, called Kumara Pillai Commission, in 1960s found that Muslims are the highest in number among those students who have not completed primary education; only 2.83 Muslims among per 1000 population were enrolled in Class 10th and this was lowest in the state. In 1970s, 13.3% of students who passed 10th class were Muslims, a big improvement but still much below their share in the population. According to one of the earlier study⁵ the unemployment is highest among the Muslim youth in the state and that has direct correlation to level of education of the community. It further provides

statistics highlighting levels of higher educational attainment of different communities in Kerala. It shows that there is 11.8 and 10.30 per cent of the STs and SCs youth population in the colleges in Kerala whereas it is only 8.1 for Muslims. The percentages for different communities including upper caste Hindus and Christians are far higher than those of Muslims. The Muslim youths are under-educated and unemployed in comparison with the Hindus and Christians. Every governments has to ensure that its people are equally represented in the government services and jobs, that is also one of the most important indicators of how far a section of population is being represented and how far justice is being done to them. Here let us look into the representation of Muslims in various government sectors. Department of education of the state of Kerala has around 12.3 percentage representation of Muslims which is less than half of the total population percentage. In the department of home it is 10.7 percentage, in the department of health 10.5 percentage. The representation of Muslims in the services of the state of Kerala and its crucial state departments are less than even half of the population percentage. These are according to the estimates of Sachar commission and the above evidences have to be seen in the era after the huge migration has taken place from this part of the Kerala. One has to really ask here where is the glamour of so called development which is marked by the migration to Gulf.

Women

Status of women is one the crucial indicators of the development of any society. Women in India from across the sections have been an underdeveloped category across times. They have shown comparatively very less work participation in the formal private and other productive sectors. Women have reported as poor, anemic, illiterates and less educated, most vulnerable for economic- social and physical violence and a huge set of issues, that has to be seen with the Indian reality. Muslim women in India are overwhelmingly self-employed where they are engaged in home based works. "Their work conditions are characterized by low income, poor work conditions, absence of toilet and crèche facilities, lack of social security benefits like health insurance and the absence of bargaining power. In several states home-based industry has virtually collapsed leaving poor Muslim women spiraling downwards to penury"(Sachar Commission, 2006). Muslim women in Kerala and Malabar does not have a different story here even when the state of Kerala do well in some of the basic gender indications pretty well as compared to the other states in the country. According to census 2001, the place in Kerala where the least women work participation reported was Thirurugadi in the Malappuram district which is one of the most predominant Muslim areas

of the state. Another study notes that Muslim women have the least work participation among all the women of the state. While there is 24.8 and 20.9 per cent of the work participation subsequently among the Hindus and Christians in the state, it is merely 7.1 per cent among the Muslim women. This has to be given very serious attention to see the deal that women among the Muslims are getting here in the state. However, in the post Gulf migration era Muslim women of Malabar are seen as the carriers of fashion and the category that have achieved high socio-economic mobility. Here, one has to find very strong reasons to argue that Muslims of Kerala and the region has got a fair deal in the post Gulf migration era.

Developmental history of Malabar or the state of Kerala cannot be simplified and shortened to a small form. However, the attempt is try to see what was the socio-economic condition in Malabar prior to the migration to Gulf and after the migration. Malabar has been in the bottom in terms of socio-economic and other over all achievement of development. Historians have well argued most of the reasons why this particular part has remained so. The decade of exodus from Kerala started from 1970 as the result of oil boom and other contributing factors. It was noted that Muslims as a single category had reported the highest migration prevalence as well as the percentage of the remittances. One has to accept the limited social mobility and development of the Muslims as the result of migration to Gulf countries. However, how far this has reflected in getting out of poverty, developments in the primary to higher education levels, general health and wellbeing of the population and per capita income increase has to be further inquired to see how far it has made changes or development among the Muslims in the post Gulf migration era. However, we do have fact findings from the recent studies which came out after the Gulf boom. Those do suggest that Muslims are one of the socio-economic and educational backward communities as compared to their other counterparts. In the given situation, Gulf migration and the propaganda of development of Muslims have to be further inquired.

1- According to census the estimates of 1999.

2- Kerala Padanam (Malayalam titled) and Development reports including Narendran commission and Sachar committee reports also validate this fact.

3- This observation was made after learning the data of 2002-03,2003-04 submitted by the states to the committee from various states.

4-Kerala Padanam (Malayalam titled)

5- Kerala Padanam, Malayalam titled (Kerala Study by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishat) which basically studied who the state's of Kerala live and think.

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