

Emerging Mappila - A Critical Assessment of Social Arbitrations in Malabar Muslims at the Post-1970's Gulf Boom

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ABSTRACT

It has often been considered that many of the landscapes of Kerala are subjected to various socio-economic transformations due to numerous historical shiftings. The early locations include three major regions; Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Each of them has unique social, economic and cultural features distinct from each other. Malabar region contains majority of state's Muslim population, where they were known as Mappilas. In history, their contributions in different social dynamics, as well as their string attempts to counter the imperialistic forces in the pre colonial, colonial, and post colonial periods were unique and worthier than any other communities in rest of the state. But they were excluded from the mainstream society due to various external and internal factors within various social constructions. Malabar region had a glorious trade relation with Arabs since the pre-colonial era and this flourished trade of Indian products declined as a result of British foreign policies later on.

Here, in the proposed paper, I would like to engage with the socio-economic transformations, cultural shifting and the progression of Mappilas from margin to mainstream during the 1970's as a result of gulf boom in Malabar. This paper reveals the experiences of a Mappila Muslim with the impact of gulf boom in the Malabar region and how it boosted the empowerment of a blighted community. This paper will empirically analyse the regional development of each of these three locations of the state and tries to prove that the Malabar region was completely neglected by various social domains sketching it as an area of polarized people. This paper, by evaluating the impact of *Nithaqath* law of Saudi Arabia in Malabar economy, concludes that the social and economic status of Mappila Muslim was resulted by nothing but petro dollar.

Keywords: Mappila Muslim, Malabar, Gulf boom, Socio-economic transformation.

There are numerous historical and geographical factors for the categorization of people. Thereby the stability of the society is in accordance with how the divisions of people are balanced, with the tolerance in race, cast, ethnicity and economy. It is imperative to confess the integral reasons behind the domain act of mainstream towards marginal that has made some sort of crises over the world today-that denied the togetherness for a better world along with questioning democracy and its civility. In this paper I tried to compact with three major arguments regarding the divisible topic, particularly the means of Mappila Muslim empowerment would be enacted the region.

1. Mappila Muslims have a glorious past in the Pre-Independent India.
2. Malabar region faced social and political discrimination after Independence.

3. The lion share of current prosperity is from the petro dollar from Middle East.

Malabar in Pre-colonial Times

Kerala has a long time trade history with different types of people around the world since BC 3000 (Najeebadi 1931: 46-58). According to Sumerian records of Mesopotamian civilization the Muziris of Kerala was famous as the land of spices and attracted traders from Babylon and Egypt to the early Kerala market. In 2nd and 3rd millennium BCE, Arabs also started trading with Muziris and rest of the places in Kerala later they enjoyed domination in international trade with the region. This trade relation with the Arabian countries paved the way for socio cultural transmission between the two regions. As a result, Islam came to Kerala at the time of Prophet Muhammad himself. One of the companions of Prophet, Malik ibn Dinar and his 12 member team came to Kerala as propagators upon the request of king Cheraman Perumal who embraced Islam after visiting Prophet and died during his return to Kerala (Parappil 1994: 34-37). Malik ibn Dinar propagated and spread Islam in Kerala with complete help and support of kings which resulted in the moulding of a big Muslim population in the state. There were many causes for the increasing number of converted Muslims where the main reason was the class and cast system in Hindu religion when Islam gave more importance to equality between followers which later resulted rethinking from the part of Hindu religion and many of social reform movements lead by Sri Narayana Guru, Ayyangali, Chattambi Swamikal and others. At the same time the Muslim community of Kerala mostly settled in Malabar region which is the northern part of the state, engaged in and emerged as the mainstream of the socio-economic progress of the state. Malabar Muslims were known as Mappilas, and they were the captains of the naval forces of kings since Hindu religion restricted its followers to travel in the sea during those times. King Zamorin-the ruler of Calicut appointed Kunjali as the head of his armed force. Later he and his followers were known as Marakkars. The Marakkars contributed a vital role in resisting Portuguese imperialism at the Malabar region, later Zamorins failed the war as a result of internal conflicts between Zamorin and Marakkars which set in motion due to the vague divisible intention of Europeans (Parappil 1994: 60-64).

History of independence is incomplete without the role of Mappila Muslims. One of the renowned freedom struggle which later came to be known as Mappila mutiny as coined by Colonial historians or Malabar rebellion as coined by Indian historians in 1921, played a big role in Muslim's involvement in freedom fighting. Muslims introduced Khilafat (Islamic succession) against British rule as a part of Ottoman war with British in Turkey and the Mappilas pledged Varian Kunnath Kunjahmed Haji as the Khalifa of Ottoman Khilafat in Kerala (Parappil 1994: 146-151). British made this movement as a mere religious mutiny and it resulted in clashes between Muslims in one side and British supported Hindus and British army in other side. The revolt resulted in the death of 10,000 and 50,000 were injured, the wagon tragedy also was a following incident of this revolt (Parappil 1994: 166-168). But the freedom fighters involved in this war got justice neither from historians nor from the government. This incident is the first of this kind where Muslims were neglected and excluded on the label of religion or cast. This phenomenon continued in the social trend of country till now until it rose as a debate in the national level just after the publishing of prime minister's high level committee report in 2006 under Rajinder Sachar. The Sachar committee report flashed light on the real socio-economic status of Muslims all over the country. The report found that Muslims are leading life worse than scheduled casts and scheduled tribes in some states. The state level report of Sachar committee shows that the state of Kerala is better performing as compared to other states and they are not as much as excluded and are a better performing

category (Sachar 2006: 47,53,56). Here the relevance of analyzing socio-economic status of Muslims in Kerala comparing to the rest of communities in the state emerges. As Kerala has a unique model of development which is experiencing some elite habit comparing to the rest of states and however it is well known as Kerala model development, it is necessary to analyze the quote of Sachar committee report about Kerala Muslims and Mappila community. If the Muslims are living a better quality life, is it because of the scientific development of inclusive policy by the government or is there any other factors playing significant role in the socio-economic development and empowerment of this community?

Malabar and Mappila Muslim Community Today

In early times, Kerala was known as Travancore, Cochin and Malabar till independence, later it merged to Travancore-cochin region under Madras presidency. After that in 1 November 1956 the state Kerala was formed under the state's reorganization act of Indian union and Malabar region also included in the Travancore and Cochin and these three regions formed as a new state. But till now these three regions are specified and analyzed for various studies as they have their own socio-economic and historic trajectories. Out of these three regions Malabar is considered as the most Muslim populated and the least developed region. The northern region of state including Kasargod, Kannur, Malappuarm, Wayanadu and Kozhikode districts are considered as Malabar region. This region was completely under-developed in terms of education, health, percapita income and employment comparing to Travancore and Cochin. According to the Kerala development report in 1901 there are only 25 medical institutions in entire Malabar region and the number of hospital beds per 100,000 persons was as low as 15, even in 1956-57 it just increased to 34 only even after 50 years which shows a stagnant growth of development. At the same time cochin region gained 33 hospital beds per 1 lakh population in 1909 itself and there was 1 medical institution per 108 square miles in cochin, in 1902 there were 1094 recognized schools including government, aided and un aided schools which caters to 71,677 students, but the population to school ratio was 1 for 1641 students in Malabar and 1:801 in Travancore region. As a result the literacy rate was around 10 percent in Malabar, 12.4 percent in Travancore and 13.4 percent in Cochin (Human development report, Kerala 2005: 09-11), this gap has widened in the following decades. Even the official reports argue that the reason for the literacy backwardness is poverty and agro based living standards. The governments and authorities never launched effective programs to promote this backward community until this exclusion was noticed by the outer world. And it is a fact that this exclusion is continuing in other way which I will empirically prove at the third part of this article.

According to census estimate of 2001 the state of Kerala accounts 67,88,384 Muslims which is the fourth most Muslim populated state in country (Banitha 2011: xxii). Unlike the Muslims of other states in India, Kerala Muslims have a comparatively higher socio-economic status in the country even though it is lower comparing to various communities in the state. When we broadly analyze the socio-economic revolution happened in the Kerala Muslims especially the Mappila of Malabar region we can see a boom or renaissance happened in both social and economic status of them after 1970s which was happened as a result of gulf boom or the rise of petro dollar.

Migration to Middle East and its Impacts

Kerala has had trade relations with Middle East since 3000 BC onwards because of the natural resources available in the state. The export and import of commercial products took place at this time until colonization. But people from Kerala started migrating to countries of GCC as job seekers only after

1970s which is after the gulf boom (Prakash 1998:3209). Middle East countries were comparatively poorer as there was lack of natural resources and it being a desert geographically. But after the discovery of petroleum deposit in Dammam on 4th march 1938 by a commercial company of Britain, economical growth took the country out of poverty. But the exploitation by European countries continued until the Middle East countries started an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 which included 13 nations. OPEC helped them to gain reasonable price for crude oil. Present flourished economy of Middle East started after oil boom of 1970 which was afterbirth of an oil embargo by OPEC nations which began in October 1973 towards various countries who support Israel in Yomkippur war between Egypt and Israel. OPEC considered this war as against all Arabian countries and a huge energy crisis occurred in all over the world which created an overall industrial crisis. By the end of embargo in April 1974 the price of crude oil raised from \$3 to \$12 globally (Farsoun 1988: 155). Among OPEC countries, the now GCC countries are the most benefited countries in the Middle East by the oil embargo as they have the highest amount of oil reserve with them. Through oil boom a huge economic uprising took place in the Middle East which made them a wealthy nation. It necessitated the development of infrastructural facilities which required huge labour force of both skilled and unskilled hands. But all of the countries were less populated and they faced scarcity of labour force in all sectors of the economy. Such higher demand attracted the labour force from all over the world especially developing and higher populated countries like India. As a result of prior experience with trading to Arabs and some other reasons like religious influence the migrants from Kerala filled a huge part of this massive requirement in skilled, semi skilled and unskilled labour force. Most of the migrants were from the Muslim community of north Kerala. At this time Malabar Muslims were facing discrimination from government and society itself which created instability in the region where poverty and unemployment became a challenge to the Mappila community. So, people were ready to travel even in a merchant ship which was very dangerous to travel and many of the travellers died on the way. This proves that the Mappila Muslims were in search of a parallel way to increase the standard of living. The migration survey proves that there were 1.3 lakh emigrants from Thiruvananthapuram district and 2.9 lakh from Malappuram district according to 1998 survey. The 2011 survey proves that the domination in migration of labour force remain in Malabar region alone where 2.29 lakh is from Thiruvananthapuram and 4 lakh from Malappuram districts (Zachariah 2012: 19). The distribution of emigrants according to religion also proves the same. See table: 1. In 1998, 29.5 percentage of emigrants were from Hindu community, 19.8 percentage from Christian and 50.7 percentage from Muslims, where the percentage of total population is 56.2, 19.0 and 24.7 percentage respectively. The muslim community dominated in 2008 also where the last survey took place as they contribute 41.1 percentage (Zachariah 2012: 27).

Table: 1. Percentage distribution of emigrants based on religions.

Religion	Percentage of total population	Percentage distribution			Emigrants per household	
		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: Zachariah

This migration resulted in a socio-economic change in the Malabar region as the oil currency flew from Middle East countries to India. According to the Kerala migration survey of 2011 there are 2.28 million Keralites living outside the country and they are sending more than Rs:49,695 crore a year as remittance. Among this, 23,089 crore is received by Muslim households of the state (Zachariah 2012: 06). It is another fact that among 2.28 million international migrants from Kerala 2.03 million are in GCC countries which is 89.4 percent of the total emigrants from the state (Zachariah 2012: 29). It is evident that a high percentage of this remittance was sent to Muslim families in Malabar region which created a double fold impact on the economy of the region. While analyzing the total remittance from abroad we can see that Malappuram district is having the highest gulf money and all other Malabar districts are getting foreign inflow of economy equal to or higher than other regions. See table: 2. Malappuram District is getting 6,156 million per annum which is 17.1 percentage of total remittance. While taking the percapita income of these regions it will be Rs.1,500 to 1700 for Malabar region and Rs. 1,000 to 1,500 for other regions.

Table: 2. Annual remittance from abroad, District wise

District	Rs. (million)	% of total
Thiruvananthapuram	3,386	9.9
Kollam	2,864	7.6
Pathanamthitta	2,328	7.1
Alappuzha	2,172	6.4
Kottayam	1,009	3.2
Idukki	38	0.1
Eranakulam	4,076	12.9
Thrissur	5,096	13.6
Palakkad	3,390	8
Malappuram	6,156	17.1
Kozhikkode	2,181	6.6
Wayanad	60	0.2
Kannur	2,057	5.7
Kasargod	511	1.6
Total	35,304	100

Source: Zachariah

This remittance contributed to poverty alleviation at the first stage of migration and later it worked as a big factor to improve the standard of living of the suppressed Mappila Muslims. Migration as a result of oil boom had significant impacts on the populace in Kerala who lived below poverty line. According to the planning commission report of 1993, the BPL population of Kerala was 53 percentages in 1977-78 which was the starting period of migration and it declined to 32 percentages in 1987-88 (Human development report, Kerala 2005: 49). According to development economists like BA Prakash the full credit of poverty alleviation could not be given to the oil boom and gulf migration, but the fact empirically shows us the exclusion of a specific community from educational and economic development based on the religion and region, and how they survived from it without a drastic change in the policy of authorities?. The answer to this question can be found only in the history of effect of oil

boom and migration. It is also a fact that the government also started initiatives for the development of Malabar and Mappila community but it was only a share distribution which should be given to all over the state. This can be validated by analyzing the impact of Nithaqath in the Malabar economy.

Nithaqath Labour Policy and Tremendous Economic Shifting

The term Nithaqath or ‘Saudization’ is used to denote the policy measures taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in their economy especially in labour market to employ Saudi citizens to generate employment for their youth. This law was initiated in mid 90s but the Kingdom was too scared to implement because of the scarcity in the labour market. The aim of this law at first level was to make all the companies having 20 or more labour force appoint 30 percentage of native labourers. This was not successful as most of the Saudi people were unskilled and companies used the loopholes of the law. Nithaqath gathered momentum in late 2000s after the advent of Jasmine Revolution. The ministry of labour of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched Saudization in labour market and government’s direct intervention also took place this time, which aimed at a quick result and high opportunities for Saudi youth as well as a better stand in the local labour market to Saudi citizens, which is currently dominated by the employees from foreign countries which reaches 90 percent of job. Out of 6.5 million of labourers, Saudis were only 0.7 million. The article 26 of Saudi labour law (2006), which is considered as the sole of modern Saudization, categorized companies into four types based on their performance in nationalization which is measured by calculating the percentage of Saudi nationals employed by the firm. They are classified into excellent, green, yellow and red categories, where the red category which has the least share of national employees was given a 13 week period to recover their stage. This time on June 2011 a joint operation of labour ministry with the help of internal ministry started an impenetrable operation which pressured all companies to implement Saudization (Ismayil 2015). According to this decision, all the companies in Saudi Arabia started dismissing their non-native staffs to employ Saudis in the company, and many of the firms who couldn’t employ Saudis because of the high payment demanded by them which reaches 3 times higher than that demanded by foreign labours.

Estimates of Kerala migration survey shows that 5.7 lakh keralites are working in Saudi Arabia which is the biggest number after UAE that accounts 25.2 percent of total emigrants in the middle east (Zachariah 2015: 29). See table: 3.

Table: 3. Percentage distribution of emigrants in Middle East countries.

Country	Percentage			
	2011	2008	2003	1998
UAE	38.7	38.7	36.5	31.0
Saudi Arabia	25.2	23.0	26.6	37.5
Oman	8.6	7.6	8.3	10.2
Kuwait	5.6	5.9	6.2	5.0
Bahrain	4.5	4.6	5.9	5.5
Qatar	6.5	5.5	5.4	4.6
Total	89.4	88.5	89.0	93.8

Source: Kerala migration survey

The lion share of these are from Malabar region especially from Malappuram district where most of the

labourers are involved in semi skilled and unskilled sectors like grocery stores, bofiyas and restaurants which has badly affected working fields by Saudization. According to private surveys 2.5 lakh small and medium scale enterprises included in red zone. There is no official systematic study on the number of affected people but it is said that about 1 lakh people from both Malappuram and Calicut districts are victims of Saudization (Unnikrishnan 2013). This incident created a big crisis in the living status of deported Keralites which affected lion share of the economy of the Malabar region too. The decline in bank shares shows how much it affected the economy. State bank of Travancore dropped 8.3 percent and South Indian bank declined 7.3 percent in the banking sector. The business, construction and real estate fields were also affected where the oil currency is the backbone. This shows that the region is not self-sufficient without gulf money till now (Unnikrishnan 2013). It is also to be noted that there were no involvements taken by the central or state government in this issue until wide criticisms came in this matter. Authorities were not ready to implement any kind of rehabilitation measures to the community who contributed a major part of the foreign currency. From the oil currency, Malabar still fills the gap of government’s exclusive policies. There are 784 aided and 254 un-aided schools in Malappuram district when only 543 government schools are allotted to the region, as the aided school system shows that the development activities took place due to the spirit and zest of people of the region. The paradox is clear when we compare the number of government schools in southern region of state, Thiruvananthapuram district has 376 un-aided, 97 aided and 516 government schools which will show a big gap when we analyze the students-teacher ratio of both regions, where Travancore have 30:1 and Malabar have 35:1(Human development Report, Kerala 2005: 34). It is also to be noted that in Travancore region, posts of teachers are losing in education institutions due to lack of students whereas in Malabar, students are approaching parallel colleges as the seats in Government schools are filled. See table: 4. The student teacher ratio of 1991 and 2001 shows that in districts like Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha the ratio is remaining same or there is only a 2 percentage decrease is shown. But in Malabar area there is a reduction of 4 to 6 percentage which shows the centralization of funds to specific areas which cause the localization and economic biasing.

Table: 4. District wise Student teacher ratio

Districts	Student – Teacher ratio	
	1991	2001
Thiruvananthapuram	31	31
Kollam	31	31
Pathanamthitta	27	25
Alappuzha	30	28
Kottayam	28	26
Idukki	33	27
Eranakulam	29	28
Thrissur	31	30
Palakkad	34	30
Malappuram	36	31
Kozhikkode	30	26
Wayanad	36	30

Kannur	28	24
Kasargod	31	28

Source: DPI, Govt. of Kerala.

Same is the condition in Health sector. According to the report of directorate of health service (2014) there are 23 community health centers and 27 multispecialty hospitals in Thiruvananthapuram district. At the same time there are only 19 CHC and 4 multispecialty hospitals in Malappuram where all the 4 are privately owned, established and run by native people. Nothing other than this is happening in all of Malabar districts. This shows that allocation of funding and development activities are not taking place in Malabar region in proportion to the population there. This is a worse face of preplanned exclusion and neglecting by the authorities. The Mappila Muslims are trying to overcome their best from this polarization by finding parallel sources and hardworking to retrieve their glorious past.

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