

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE MINOR PROJECT

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ON

OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT AND CHANGE IN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

**A Study on the Nature of Occupational Shift among Migrated
Syrian Catholics in North Malabar**

SUBMITTED

TO

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Migration has contributed more to economic social and cultural development in a region. Apart from the development of the region it facilitates retaining the demographic balance. The group migration brings more development in the new land. The factors and variables that determine changes is different from society to society and from time to time. Migration is one such crucial economic variable that exerts a pervasive influence on the socio-economic, political and demographic structure of both the sending and receiving areas.

Migration is basically a spatial mobility from one place to the next. This can happen with or without effecting occupational mobility. Migration is a socio-economic variable because it is capable of effecting occupational change among individuals and groups. If migration is planned towards a destination of permanent nature having the deliberate involvement of a group of people, its influence would be quite far-reaching.

In the account of Travancore to Malabar Christian migration, it is generally held that production and productivity of Malabar agriculture increased manifold. By this all the sections related to agriculture sector were equally benefited and influenced. The migration of Syrian Catholic migrants from Travancore to Malabar starting from 1920's is a historical event in the history of Kerala. This migration has been eventful and unique in many respects. As a result of this migration a new chapter was added in the economic as well as in the agricultural history of South India.

Migration of farmers from central Kerala to Malabar region is unique while considering any other migration. It's a community or cluster migration; wherein a group homogeneous people along with their close kin migrated together for a better livelihood. Most of them sold away their entire property in the motherland and settled in several parts of Malabar. In the initial phase they faced hurdles and constraints. The peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar made a significant addition to the agricultural labour force. Gradually they flourished in this new land. There have been substantial changes that have taken place in the economic sphere of Malabar region. They not only boosted agricultural sector but also themselves benefited out of that.

The majority of Christian migrants that is the first generation, they were talented agriculturalists and hard working. Thus, they led an agricultural revolution especially that of

commercial crops in Malabar. However the involvement of second and third generations of this Christian migrated community in agricultural activity was observed to be declining. This made significant impact on the agricultural production and in the crop pattern in the North Malabar. The study focused to know the generation after generation's occupational shift of Malabar settled Christian migrants and also find the reasons behind this change

The migration of farmers from central Kerala was started in 1920s. It was first initiated by a group Syrian Christians. Majority of the migrants were small peasant farmers who went to make Malabar their permanent settlement. Central Travancore had experienced a steep increase in population in early 20th century and pressure on fertile land increased. At the same time people realized the potential in the large uncultivated lands in the northern regions called Malabar which was then part of Madras province under British rule. In the beginning it was only an isolated attempt of landless and enterprising few. But gradually households having more land also started settling in Malabar. By the end of 1920s almost the entire cultivable areas in Travancore was brought under cultivation. So the peasants of Travancore had to seek opportunities outside the region. Migration continued up to 1970s and 1980s. For migration to take place the potential migrants should know about the places where lands are available. Though the people of the two regions – Travancore and Malabar speak the same language, there was practically no administrative, political or economic links between them. Some of the peasant farmers of the interior parts of Travancore got to information of the availability of cultivable lands. Some potential migrant farmers took the trouble of visiting Malabar and finding out the actual conditions in Malabar.

Malabar Migration refers to the large-scale migration of Syrian Christians from Central-South Kerala to northern regions of Kerala called Malabar in the 20th century. The migration started from early decades of 20th century and continued well into the 1970s and 1980s. This migration had a significant demographic and social impact as the Christian population of Malabar increased 15-fold. Central Travancore had experienced a steep increase in population in early 20th century and pressure on arable land increased. At the same time people realised the potential in the large uncultivated lands in the northern regions called Malabar which was then part of Madras Province under British Rule. Land was bought from the local rulers and plantations were set up. Against many odds, the community thrived, thereby attracting more migrants and by the 1950s had reached its peak. The vast majority of

the migrants were Syrian Christians, mainly (Syrian Malabar Nasrani) from erstwhile Travancore state. The migrants were mostly from present day Kottayam and Idukki districts with many from hill areas of Ernakulam district also. Several Hindu Nairs also migrated. Settlements were established in various hill areas of Malabar region (north Kerala) including in the following districts of current Kerala Kasargod, Kannur, Calicut, Wayanad, Malappuram, Palakkad and Thrissur. Huge tracts of uncultivated forest and waste land were converted into farms and plantations during this period. The supportive role of Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is well acknowledged as they supported this young community with churches, schools, hospitals and other infrastructure. The migration has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people moving to these lands. As a result the demography of Malabar has been altered significantly especially in the eastern hill region.

In Malabar they focused particularly spice-cultivation cash crops. Because of the relatively thick forest. However, by this time there occurred a chain of developments in other regions and sectors also. The geographical features have also very much favored the diversified land use pattern as well as diversified occupational pattern. The expansion of plantation sector in the forest region of Malabar attracted many enterprising cultivators (majority being Syrian Christians) of Travancore during 1920s. Unlike other states, the agriculture sector in Kerala has been dominated by commercial crops like coconut, rubber, tea, coffee and spices, historically.

This study has covered mainly three generations, the first generation being the forefathers who migrated to North Malabar and the third generation being the grown up people actively engaged either in higher studies or any other profession at present. The main focus of this study was the change in the occupational interest of three generations separately and it came out with the following findings.

Among the people of first generation of the migrated Syrian Catholics 94% engaged solely in agriculture sector and the remaining in service sector. Food crops and cash crops were cultivated even though the major crop was food crops. Among the second generation only 50.5% continued the occupation of their parents and the remaining left out of agriculture sector. Most of them opted service sector and a minority shifted to secondary sector. Among the factors responsible for a considerable shift, the major factor was the access to better educational opportunities. While there were only 6% of the people who secured education

above SSLC in first generation, 44.5% in second generation and 91.75% in third generation were educated above SSLC.

The second factor is the reduction in the size of the land holdings over the generations. While 64% of the first generation had land holdings above 50 Acres, only 6.5% of the families of second generations had land holdings above 50 Acres. This has reduced the size of surplus that they could earn from agriculture and made this sector less attractive. Another factor is found to be the increasing number of migration in the community to other states and abroad searching for better jobs and opportunities.

There is also considerable change in the sectoral contribution to household income and the generations. For 94% of people in the first generation agriculture was the sole source of income. However, only 29% of second generation earned their whole income from agriculture. Unlike the first generation the people of second and third generation show little interest in agricultural sector. The data show that while majority of the first generation were engaged in agriculture sector there is almost a complete departure of the third generation from agriculture sector.
