



Cover Page

DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.17>



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

ISSN:2277-7881; IMPACT FACTOR :7.816(2021); IC VALUE:5.16; ISI VALUE:2.286

Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal: VOLUME:10, ISSUE:6(1), June:2021

Online Copy of Article Publication Available: www.ijmer.in

Digital certificate of publication: <http://ijmer.in/pdf/e-Certificate%20of%20Publication-IJMER.pdf>

Scopus Review ID: A2B96D3ACF3FEA2A

Article Received: 10th June - Publication Date:30th June 2021

AGRARIAN MIGRATION AND SOCIO- ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN PALAKKAD

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Abstract

Human Migration is a live subject of under many disciplines of social science. It is not just a movement of people from one circumstance to another but this has many dimensions. Migrants influence the culture, pattern and landscape of another society where they settle on permanent or semi-permanent basis. Large scale migration especially of Christians took place from the southern parts of Kerala to the northern parts, in search of livelihood, during the period before and after the formation of the state. Although the migration had started in 1930s and continued up to the 1970s. The migration made a significant impact upon the social, economic, cultural and demographic system of the northern Kerala, the erstwhile Malabar district. The immediate impact on the migration was the increase in the population of Malabar together with the growth of agriculture. The entire agricultural scenario of Malabar was transformed by the hardworking farmers from the south. The migrants established churches, schools, hospitals and other necessary infrastructure. Development took place in the field of culture, living standard, trade, communication and social services. Migration resulted in the overall economic development of the Malabar region. Several roads were built and transport facilities increased.

Keywords: Human Migration, Socio- Economic, Transformation, Landscape.

Introduction

Migration in the history of mankind is a phenomenon of great interest to Sociologists, Anthropologists, Economists and Historians. Christian Migration to Malabar started in the 1920s and continued up to 1970s. The migrants were mainly from Central Travancore, and hail from present Meenachil, Muvattupuzha, Kanjirappilly and Changanacherry taluks. Migration of people from the former Travancore to Malabar was the result of some peculiar socio-economic characteristics of the period. Till the end of the nineteenth century what prevailed in Travancore was a subsistence economy. By the end of the nineteenth century subsistence economy in Travancore began to disintegrate. One of the basic reasons behind the collapse of subsistence economy in Travancore was the change in the attitude towards material comforts. It led to enormous change in the agricultural field, to the cultivation of cash crops. The demand in the international market for cash crops like Coconut, Ginger, Pepper, and Cardamom etc. led to the commercialization of agriculture.

Causes of Migration

The passing of the Land Reform Bills resulted in two major changes in Travancore, first the farmers became the real owners of the farm land. Secondly, the status of land changed from a factor of production to that of capital. As a result of this, the price of land increased and there were large scale attempts on the part of the people to increase the area of land under their ownership. The financially well-to-do farmers bought more land with money but others sold their land at high prices and went in search of places where they could land buy cheaply. Under these conditions, the change in the social relations made migration inevitable. Thus, the crumble of subsistence economy and the resultant socio-economic changes precipitate the physical conditions for migration, there were many other reasons which necessitated the movement of people from south to north of Kerala.

There was a widespread famine in Travancore during the Second World War. Travancore used to import rice from Burma. But when the Japanese captured Burma in 1942, the shortage of rice became acute still. With the India-Pak division of 1947 one of the rice producing area Sind became a part of Pakistan. The famines broke the backbone of the agricultural system in Travancore. As priority was given in the cultivation of cash crops, there was even a decline in the plantation of tapioca which was serving as a substitute for rice. It was in this context that the farmers of Travancore came to know that fertile land was available in Malabar at rather low-cost rates. Demographic factor is an important factor for the migration. The pressure on farmers to find more and more land for cultivation to meet the growing needs of a family or community was one of the major causes for migration.

A major factor that encouraged the migration towards the countryside during the latter half of the nineteenth century was the new taxation policy adopted in Travancore in 1883. The holders of the land had to pay not only the tax for the actual area of land owned or cultivated by them, but also many other heavy dues including tax on trees such as coconut, jack, tamarind and areca. The Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer in Travancore and his administration badly affected poor peasantry especially Christian peasantry. This is another factor which helped the migration of Christian peasants to Malabar.



Malabar was one of the two Districts situated on the west coast of the Malabar State. The district stretched along the shores of the Arabian Sea for a distance about 150 miles with the South Canara district in the North, the Coorg and the Mysore States, the Nilgiris and Coimbatore districts on the East and the states of Travancore and Cochin on the South. All land in Malabar was regarded as the private property of the Janmis. Though land had to be obtained on lease from the feudal chiefs, land was available in abundance and at cheaper rates and the local landlords were inclined to welcome farmers from Travancore. Most of the land owned by big landlords in Malabar were fragmented into bits and leased out of the tenants on Kanam and Verumpattam. (An agreement signed by landlord and the peasant for cultivation in the land only for a year)

Land prices in Malabar were very low as compared to land prices in Travancore. The price of an acre of land in Travancore was enough to buy almost hundred acres of land in Malabar. This provided a great incentive to the Christian community in Travancore which had been confronted with the problems of excessive fragmentation of their parental holdings. The low price of land in Malabar and increasing tendency of cultivation of commercial crops coupled with the aforesaid situations in Travancore helped the migration of small peasants to Malabar.

Migration to Palakkad

Migration from Travancore to Malabar started during the 1920s, alongside with the short distance migration to the highland regions of Travancore. The first wave of migration to Malabar took place in 1926 to the unoccupied dry lands of Kuttiyadi region. Sixteen families of peasant farmers from Meenachil, Thodupuzha, and Changanacherry taluks migrated to the jungle lands around Kuttiyadi region between 1927 and 1930. However practically all of them had to quit their new home when they fell victims to malaria fever and attack from wild animals. The main centres of migration in Malabar were Kasargod, Hosdurg, Talipparambu, Thalassery, Wynadu, Quilandi, Kozhikode, Perinthalmanna and Mannarkkad taluk of Palakkad district.

Migration to Mannarkkad taluk in Palakkad was a continuation of the Malabar migration started in the 1920s. Major centres of migration in Mannarkkad are Attappadi, Pottassery, Karakurissi, Irumbakachola and Palakkayam. Majority of the migrants were Syrian Christians. The early history of Mannarkkad is linked with Mannarkkad Moopil Nairs. He exercised power over the Attappadi, Kanhirapuzha and Kumaramputhur regions. There are no historical documents about the emergence of Moopil Nairs into such a strong position, except for hear-say and myths which have the myths on the birth of Kerala. Moopil Nairs were the Desavazhees of Mannarkkad. During the post-Independence period, due to issues regarding partition of land and property the Moopil Nair Tarawad began to decline. With the implementation of Land Reform Acts they lost their land. The Reserve Forest Act of 1972 completed the collapse of Moopil Nairs.

The early history of the hilly regions is closely linked with the British. The British had heard of the rich forest long before the migrants reached there. The region supplied the churuli trees for the production of sleepers used in Rail Roads. For the transportation of wooden logs, the British had made forest pathways of width up to 20 feet. These forest roads were known as Eals. These Eals were once the tracks used by the elephants. In addition to Pattiar Bungalow and Sinkampara Bungalow, remains of few more buildings are also seen in the hilly areas reminding us of the British times.

John Hunt, an Englishman, had reached Kanhirapuzha much before the migrants from Travancore came here. In 1916 he bought 3000 acres of land on lease from Moopil Nair for 99 years. He surveyed the land and prepared a detailed plan. The plan document states that the land measured 3000 acres and 96 cents. He converted the land into a rubber plantation and called it "Pulikkal Rubber Estate". It was in this context in 1921 the Mappila Rebellion started. To escape from the revolutionaries, he took refuge in the forest. When they reached his estate, his pet dog which was locked in the kennel started to bark. Though they made a thorough search of the place they couldn't find him there. The angry crowd freed the dog and it rushed towards his master who was hiding in a trench. The rebels who followed the dog caught him and killed him there itself. As per the existing laws, if one failed to pay the lease for three years continuously then the land would go back to the landlords. Therefore, Moopil Nair became the owner of the 3000 acres of land.

It was Karipparambil Jacob Thomas and Maliyekkal Thomas Joseph who pioneered migration in Mannarkkad in 1926. In Mannarkkad they came to know that 3000 acres of land with survey plan was put on sale. They bought the land from the Moopil Nair Ramanunni Nair on lease for 99 years. The lease agreement was prepared on May 10, 1926 and it was registered on August 12, the same year, at Mannarkkad Register office. The lease document clearly mentions that the land which lies in Palakkad district, Valluvanad taluk, Pottasseryamsom and Injikkunnu hillocks was called Pulikkal Rubber Estate. "Jacob Thomas sold all his land and property in Kanjirappilly and shifted to Mannarkkad. In 1929 he built a bungalow in Mannarkkad and started living there with entire family and he also constructed a church (St. James) near his Bungalow.

In 1932 Kuttiparambil Joseph from Vaikom, bought 500 acres of land in Palakkayam-Chendhandan hills. In 1942, Maliyekkal Thomman and Pallivathukkal George Thomas, both belonging to Kanjirappilly, and Mangali Itira from Angamali, bought



Cover Page

DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.06.17>



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Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal: VOLUME:10, ISSUE:6(1), June:2021

Online Copy of Article Publication Available: www.ijmer.in

Digital certificate of publication: <http://ijmer.in/pdf/e-Certificate%20of%20Publication-IJMER.pdf>

Scopus Review ID: A2B96D3ACF3FEA2A

Article Received: 10th June - Publication Date:30th June 2021

those 500 acres of land of five shares. In 1949, Kizhakkekara Thomas, bought 1800 acres of land in Irumbakachola. After this Irumbakachola-Palakayam-Injikkunnu region became a centre of human activity. Kizhakkekara Thomas encouraged people to migrate to Irumbakachola. Thomas himself gave them land in 1952 and thereafter many others also came to this region. It was K.P.Madhavan Nair who pioneered migration in Poonchola region. Hereafter Poonchola also became a destination for Migrants.

Poverty and diseases haunted the lives of early migrants. Malaria was a common threat to all Malabar migrants. Wild animals also posed serious threat to life. Natural calamities were very common. Majority of the Migrants were Christians till 1960, the nearest church was in Mannarkkad. In 1960 a church was built in Pottassry. In course of time the migrant's override their early problems.

Social and Economic Changes

Migration brought in significant changes in the socio-economic structure of Malabar. The migrants had enjoyed several physical conveniences and good social atmosphere in Travancore; however, those facilities were absent in Malabar especially in Mannarkkad taluk in Palakkad. Consequently, they took special interest in the establishment of schools, roads, post offices, co-operative societies, transport facilities, telecommunication and electricity in these areas. Mannarkkad has also undergone drastic socio-economic and cultural changes as a result of migration. This paper is a detailed discussion of the impacts of migration on socio-economic and cultural spheres of Mannarkkad in Malabar.

The Impact of the migration on the economy of Malabar in particular Mannarkkad in Palakkad needs special mention. Large scale production of commercial crops like Rubber, Ginger, arecanut, and coconut, advanced methods of cultivation and the introduction of new agricultural crops immensely influenced economy of this region small scale farmers who migrated to Malabar in order to escape the differentiating and depressing pressures of commercialisation of agriculture in Travancore brought in powerfully the spirit and relations of commercial agriculture in feudal Malabar. They began to cultivate commercial crops in this region. In addition to extending the cultivation of such crops, they also introduced tapioca which was so far unknown in Malabar.

Tapioca was unknown in Malabar before the arrival of migrants that some early migrants recall that the wild boar in Malabar which used to demolish all other crops, was not touching tapioca as it did not know the taste of this new crop. With the increase in migration, tapioca cultivation spread all over Malabar. The migrants made seemingly justifiable claim that it was their tapioca that saved Malabar from an imminent famine in early 1940s. The settlers who also believed to have introduced the Travancore pepper plant, which yields annually from the second year onwards unlike the Malabar pepper, which yields late and only in alternative years. They also brought seeds of better quality and higher yields. They cultivated ginger, lemongrass, cashew nut, coconut etc.¹ The migration helped in the increase of the total income from agriculture in Kerala. In 1960-61 the total income from agriculture was 230.91 crores but it increased to 311 crores by 1975-76. This kind of increase happened only after the migration of farming population of Malabar.

One of the impacts of the migration is the expansion of agriculture in Malabar. The Christian migration has helped to bring about a green revolution in Malabar. The church agencies gave training to the farmers by starting efficient training centres for agriculture and animal husbandry. There was a big leap in agriculture field also after migration. The migration of peasants from central Travancore to the unoccupied land of Mannarkkad had resulted in several changes in the taluk. The economic situation of this area underwent a drastic change due to the introduction of new crops. The migrants invested capital in the land, which they brought from Travancore and started intensive cultivation. It was unfamiliar to the native farmers of Palakkad. With the arrival of migrants from Travancore the places like Injikkunnu, Niravu, cheenikkappara etc. became centres of cash crop cultivation. The migrant farmers converted even the arid non-fertile places to rich soil and planted major cash crops. The people in the nearby regions who cultivated only rice till then learned lessons in cash crop cultivation from migrants. The cash crops improved the financial conditions of the people. Before the implementation of Land Reform Acts the migrants didn't have any valid documents for the land under their possession. Land Reforms introduced by the government in the second half of the twentieth century had removed the barriers in cultivation and provided security of tenure to the farmers. Land Reforms affected by the Kerala government became an effective instrument for planned social change in India. They resulted in the growth of agricultural production and reduction of socio-economic injustice.ⁱⁱⁱ² In the implementation of land reforms in Kerala, Devaswam land and private janmam lands were brought under this Act. As per the Land Reforms Acts, Land Tribunals came into being, and the migrants were awarded title deeds for their land. The agricultural sector in Mannarkkad grew much in strength. Both the area of cultivation and productivity increased. The condition of the roads improved.



In Malabar, churches were the first public buildings constructed by the migrants. And these churches were not only a place of worship for the people but acted as a regular meeting place of people from a different area of their settlement. The donation of land to the church was a common thing among the migrants.³For the Holy Mass, the people prepared a room in one of the suitable houses in their area. After this, the migrants discussed the matter with the priest and after this; they located land and raised money for the construction of the church. This was the pattern for the many of the churches like Mannarkkad, Kanhirapuzha, Palakkayam, Irumbakachola, Poonchola and so on. In 1925; the migrants started their settlement in Mannarkkad. There was no church in the area. So the migrants contacted the Latin Diocese of Calicut for the construction of a church in Mannarkkad. It was karippaparambil family donated the place to construct a church at Nellippuzha, Mannarkkad. The construction of the church was completed in the year 1931. Up to 1959, this was the only church in Mannarkkad area.

In 1950s, the migrants reached in the areas of Kanhirapuzha, Palakkayam, irumbakachola and Poonchola etc. In 1953 December 31, the Diocese of Thalassery came into existence. Thus, the churches were established in Kanhirapuzha and Palakkayam. Here after the region of Mannarkkad came under Kanhirapuzha⁴. Kanhirapuzha St. Thomas church came into being in the year 1960. It was the first Syrian church in this area. Another important church was Palakkayam church. Before the construction of the church, the migrants in Palakkayam depended on the churches in Pottasseri(kanhiapuzha) and Manarkkad. As the number of Christians increased, it was decided to construct a church in Palakkayam. Poovathingal Thomas donated 10 acres of land for the construction of church at Palakkayam in 1962, Fr. Kurian Pandiamakkal, celebrated the holy mass there. In 1981, from PazhayaPalakkayam, the church was relocated to the centre of Palakkayam.

Thomas Kizhakkekkara had donated 10 acres of land for the construction of St.Sebastin's church at Irumbakachola in 1973.The church is situated 3.5 km away from kanhirapuzha dam. The migrants and the parish priests had given great importance to the cultivation of the land of the church. The migrants had engaged in voluntary labour or pothupani. The construction of the church was completed on 6th April, 1974. The migrants had provided not only material support but also physical labour (pothupani) for the construction of the church. Pidiyari system (handful of rice) was another method used to raise fund for the construction of church. The donation of land to the church was a common thing among the migrants.

The facilities for education in Mannarkkad were very limited before the coming of migrants. The migrants had given top priority to the education of their children immediately after their settlement. The migrants donated land; money and material generously for the construction of schools. Earlier small sheds were made in the land both for worship and education. Sometimes they used the building for the church as school. In most of the places like Palakkayam, Irumbakachola, Kanhirappuzha and Attappadi, schools were built along with the churches. Nirmala A.L.P.School at Irumbakachola, Carmel U.P. School at Palakkayam, Holy Family School at Mundakkunnu were the examples of schools started after the arrival of migrants. Earlier the nearest school was in Pottassery. In 1789, Carmel U.P. School was established and in 1983 the school was up graded to a High School. In 1982, in Irumbakachola a primary school was started under the initiative of Palakkad diocese.

Bullock cart was the chief means of transport till the middle of the 20th century. Numerous people including children and women died on the way to hospitals without medical help due to the lack of roads and transport facilities. Travel was impossible in the few roads in Mannarkkad and to the regions like Irumbakachloa, Palakkayam and Poonchola regions, in the monsoon season at the time of migration. The roads were constructed for the transportation of timber from the forests. The migrants needed for travel and transportation of their goods to markets. Where a road was needed the people used to form a road committee usually under the leadership of a parish priest.

Electrification of villages had a tremendous influence on the development process. Due to the influence of the migrant's majority of the settlements were electrified. In the electrification of the settlements, the role of rich and influential migrants, parish priests and political leaders should be noted. The government policy of 'velichaviplavam' (light revolution) promoted by the then electricity minister K.M.Mani largely helped in the mission of rural electrification in general and settlements of the migrants in particular. As a part of this programme the places like Palkkayam, Irumbakachola and Poonchola were electrified.

Conclusion

Migration to Mannarkkad was a continuation of the Malabar migration. It started in 1926 and continued up to 1970. The new life of migrants was not a pleasant experience. Attacks from wild animals and diseases took the lives of many. Poverty and natural calamities intensified their problems. Migration has resulted in tremendous changes in Mannarkkad not only in agricultural but in all



spheres of life. Foremost among them was the growth in population. The hilly areas of taluk also grew in infrastructural facilities like roads, bridges, school, hospital, and electricity and telephone exchange. A remarkable development during the later period was the large-scale influx of immigrants, particularly Christians from the Travancore- Cochin area of the state into the Malabar. The vast majority of the migrants were engaged in agriculture and agricultural labour. The migrants had permanently settled down and they were mainly engaged in the cultivation of food crops and commercial crops like rubber, pepper, ginger lemon grass tapioca and cashew. In recent times, there has been news of the migrants in Malabar abandoning their land and property. The migrant farmers find it very difficult to cope with the pressure of life among mounting living costs. Drastic fall in the price of agricultural produce, adverse climatic conditions, crop destruction by wild animals, etc. compel them to move out of the land where they spent in all their productive years. Realizing that they would never become a part of the mainstream if they hang on to their holdings any more, one by one, migrant families are moving to small towns in the plains.

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Creation Date: 12/21/2020 11:11:00 AM
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Last Saved On: 6/12/2021 11:42:00 PM
Last Saved By: Murali Korada
Total Editing Time: 96 Minutes
Last Printed On: 7/1/2021 11:07:00 AM
As of Last Complete Printing
 Number of Pages: 5
 Number of Words: 3,610 (approx.)
 Number of Characters: 20,577 (approx.)