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### **Farmer Migration and Agrarian Transformation in Kerala : Impacts on the Local Economy, Society and the Agrarian Landscape in the Erstwhile Malabar Region**

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LOCAL ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND THE AGRARIAN  
LANDSCAPE IN THE ERSTWHILE MALABAR REGION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to examine the process of peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar and the resultant agrarian transformation triggered by the development monoculture and the socio-economic impacts on the migrant households as well as the long-term implications on the agrarian landscape and ecology of the region. The specific objectives of the study were to: (a) trace the demographic and socio-economic profile of the migrant households as well as the occupational shift and the status of ownership of household assets in the erstwhile Malabar villages; (b) understand the dynamics of migration induced agrarian transformation, including the catalytic role played by various agencies; and (c) reflect on the implications of the agrarian transformation on the agro-ecological landscape and sustainable farm livelihoods of the migrant households.

The paper brings out the emergence of rubber as the dominant land use, which already has impacted in terms of shrinkage of farm lands grown with other food as well as cash crops in the migrant villages. Though expansion of rubber per se, may not have caused a decline of other commercial or food crops in the region, the several advantages that rubber enjoyed, had invariably influenced a majority of small and marginal farmers to grow rubber and thereby rationalize their farming choices. It appears that the institutional as well as policy interventions followed by the Rubber Board and other crop promotional agencies, including the State Agriculture Department have been mutually exclusive and hence, a major segment of the farmers in the state have always been attracted by the farmer friendly institutional support systems provided by the Rubber Board, which in fact, turned out to be pervasive in terms of promoting rubber monoculture. From a sustainable agriculture development perspective, the paper calls for effective collaborations and co-ordination between various crop- promotional agencies in Kerala, such as the Rubber Board, Spices Board, Coconut Development Board, Kerala Horticulture Development Board, Coffee Board, the State Agriculture Department, etc to come together and devise a long-term agricultural development policies and strategies for the state in general and the Malabar region in particular.

## 1. Introduction

Development theorists consider migration as an instrumental factor in social and economic transformation of primitive subsistence economies into capitalist economies through accelerating the process of economic development<sup>1</sup>. Where economies of scale and agglomeration are considered desirable objectives of economic development, high levels of net migration or natural increase may improve economic opportunities inducing increased migration across space and time. Depending on the various processes and actors involved, migration may also be described as historically induced by economic opportunities opened up by the international trade in commodities and services or attracted by the “abundant and extensive land frontier” to take advantage of the process of commercialisation of agriculture elsewhere.

The state of Kerala is quite known in the migration and development literature since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a potential region for outmigration of populations. There have been different patterns and processes of migration in the state of Kerala at different points in its history especially during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and these patterns broadly reflected internal and external migrations. While the process of internal migration has been characterised by the movement of the peasantry and landless labourers across the three erstwhile regions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar in Kerala, external migration was evident from: a) the movement of people to work as administrative staff and workers in the colonial plantations in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, West Asia and even Africa; b) temporary migration of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers to the middle-east; and (c) inter-state migration of skilled/ educated labour force from Kerala.

The processes of inter-regional labour as well as peasant migrations that took place between 1920 and 1960 within Kerala and the socio-economic situations including tenurial conditions that prevailed in these regions have been extensively documented by several scholars (Panikar *et al.*, 1978; Panikkar 1979; Tharakan, 1977; Raj and Tharakan, 1983; George and Tharakan, 1984; Joseph 1988; Joseph, 1991; Radhakrishnan, 1989; Varghese, 2006a, b). Tharakan (1977), for instance, examined the causes of migration

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<sup>1</sup> A recent survey of studies on migration in India’s specific context underscores that about one fourth (20%) of regions in India experienced a phenomenon, called, migration persistence’ over the past one century or more. The high level of migration persistence has been circular, male dominated and has been associated with substantial flow of remittances to the source regions. These remittance based migration streams have persisted because of strong social networks and a culture of migration that has evolved around certain source-region specific factors, such as gender norms, agrarian systems and other exogenous factors (Tumbe, 2012).

from Travancore to Malabar by underlining the impact of population pressure on agricultural land, Christian way of inheritance, fragmentation of property, etc. In another study Tharakan (1981) examined the demographic scenario of the erstwhile Travancore and Malabar regions in the wake of the peasant migration during the period between 1930 and 1950.

Zacharia *et al.*, (2002) provide detailed account of the process of migration from Kerala in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They report that until 1931, Kerala had experienced net immigration due to the plantation economies of Wynad and Idukki districts. However, after 1931, Kerala witnessed the process of labour out-migration, which got further accelerated with the 'gulf boom' in the late 1970s.

An earlier study by Tharakan (1977) examines the causes of migration from Travancore to Malabar by underlining the impact of population pressure on agricultural land, the system of inheritance leading to fragmentation of property, etc. On a dissenting note, Panoor (1989) underscores the annihilation of tribal communities as a result of peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar. He contends that the migration of peasant communities from Travancore to Malabar invariably destroyed the very basis of the tribal economy. It was observed that the migrant settlers were mainly responsible for land alienation of the tribal communities who are in fact uprooted from their traditional culture and settlement.

The studies by Varghese (2006a, b) have examined the crucial aspects of the peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar, the dominance of Syrian Christian community, the asset position of the migrants at the time of migration, the cropping systems developed, etc. Further, Varghese (2009) notes that 'once the land in central and eastern regions of Travancore got exhausted, the Syrian Christians, mostly small farmers, began to migrate to the undefiled tracts [virgin lands] of British Malabar, where almost half of the area available for occupation, excluding the wastelands and forests, was yet to be brought under agriculture. Despite initial setbacks, the migrant communities, both in the regions of Travancore and Malabar, began to make their fortunes by cultivating new tracts in the respective areas, which precipitated further population movement in search of land (Varghese, 2009: 47).

The study by Joseph (1988) may be considered as a baseline study that provides an elaborate exploration of the important factors that paved the way for peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar. The study has been quite instrumental in terms of identifying some of the important factors that triggered the process of migration.

Accordingly, it identified factors, such as: education, rise in the price of cash crops and population pressure at the family level as the major push factors.

Based on the historical structural approach, Joseph (1988) demonstrated the process of transformation of an immobile and subsistent peasantry into a highly versatile commercialized rentier class. The migrants from Travancore cleared the jungle and converted them into paddy fields and plantations of rubber, coffee and orchards of coconut and gardens of areca and pepper in the upland regions of Malabar from north to south. The development consciousness which set in motion the migratory movement of the peasants of Travancore seems to have ruled the roost in shaping and reshaping the land use pattern in different stages. Any development was feasible only with material resources in terms of money. Naturally, the migrants introduced those crops that can fetch the maximum yield in terms of value and discontinued those crops that did not command a good price in the market. On seeing the success of the venture, the native people who were indifferent to reclaim cultivable wastelands in the past also came forward and opened plantations and orchards in many parts of the interior areas of Malabar (Joseph 1988: 162).

A notable study by Sebastian (2007) set in the context of the migrant cultivators in Kannur district in North Kerala, examined the impact of migration and development of agriculture on the human development attributes of the migrant households. The study traced the education and human development linkages across the three generations of migrants in the Kannur district and established that the investments in human capital by the peasant migrants have significantly contributed to growth and development in the migrant villages.

### ***1.1.The problem and Objectives***

Notwithstanding the historical and empirical significance of the above studies examining the process of peasant migration from Central to North Kerala regions, it may be observed that there are hardly any studies that have explored the implications of peasant migration on the agrarian landscape and agro-ecology. The existing literature seems to be constrained in terms of not providing a comprehensive account of the impacts of peasant migration on the economy, society and the agrarian landscape of the erstwhile Malabar region. By and large, the literature traces the trajectory of peasant migration in the broader context of the observed patterns of inter-regional as well as inter-country

migrations from Kerala<sup>2</sup>. Though the question of ecological implications is a complex one, in simple terms, it signifies the radical shift in the land use and cropping pattern from an apparently diverse food crop based agriculture system to a cash crop oriented monoculture system in the erstwhile Malabar region of Kerala. To that extent, there is a dearth of understanding about the way in which the peasant migration in particular has impacted the betterment of livelihoods and socio-economic development of the migrant farmer communities, along with reflecting upon the specific impacts on the agrarian landscape of the migration destinations in the erstwhile Malabar region.

Moreover, the story of peasant migration induced agrarian transformation in the erstwhile Malabar region is also important to be understood in terms of exploring ‘whether the cropping pattern evolved in the erstwhile Malabar region has been a rigorous and systematic broadcasting of a monoculture system of agriculture as already happened in the Travancore region?’. In that case, we argue that such a scenario is a cause for concern as regards the sustainability and integrity of the agrarian landscape of the erstwhile Malabar [northern Kerala] region, which has been once known for its diverse land use including paddy based wetlands and garden land cash crops, such as pepper along with the presence of a rich stock of natural capital and mountainous agro-ecologies.

Against this backdrop, the present study attempts to examine the process of peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar and the resultant agrarian transformation triggered by the development monoculture and the socio-economic impacts on the migrant households as well as the long-term implications on the agrarian landscape and ecology of the region. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- a) Trace the demographic and socio-economic profile of the migrant households as well as the occupational shift and the status of ownership of household assets in the erstwhile Malabar villages;
- b) Understand the dynamics of migration induced agrarian transformation, including the catalytic role played by various agencies; and
- c) Reflect on the implications of the agrarian transformation on the agro-ecological landscape and sustainable farm livelihoods of the migrant households.

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<sup>2</sup> Broadly, the studies on peasant migration in the preset context of Kerala have examined: (a) the socio-economic living conditions of the migrant farmers while at Travancore and later in the Malabar; (b) the reasons for migration; (c) the initial hurdles and losses encountered by the migrants and the coping strategies they adopted; (d) the role of agencies and factors that contributed to the success and stability of livelihoods; (e) aspects of educational and occupational shift across generations; and (f) the overall socio-economic advancements and human development outcomes of the migrant households and the regions where the migrants have settled (Joseph, 1988, 2002; Retnaraj, 2003; Sebastian, 2007).



### ***1.2. Data and Methods***

Primarily, the study intends to get an understanding of the socio-economic advancement of the farmers who have migrated from Travancore to Malabar during early 1940s through the 1980s. It then goes on to explore the question of agrarian transformation in the region triggered by the process of smallholder driven rubber plantation development in particular. In order for this, we undertook an empirical survey during March 2015 covering a sample of 50 migrant households each from three villages, *viz.*, Eruvessy, Naduvil and Alakode located in the Taliparamba taluk in Kannur district in North Kerala. To reflect upon the changing land use dynamics, we also use some baseline data gathered from the Eruvessy village during 1998 covering a total of 804 sample households, including 506 farm households and 135 labour households.

The sample of 50 households was selected based on the criteria that the sample so chosen adequately represents three generations of migrant farmer households, so as to get a better reflection of the agrarian change and occupational shift across generations. By and large, the migrant households in the Malabar region fall into two groups: (a) those, who migrated during the period 1940s through 1980s when vast and cheap lands were available in abundance for cultivation of commercial crops; and (b) those, who migrated subsequently and purchased land at relatively higher rates from the earlier migrants.

The study uses a mixed methodology approach, by which it tries to collate and discuss the available data and secondary literature on the process of peasant migration and its impacts on the socio-economic status of the migrant households as well as the implications on the local economy, society and the agrarian landscape. It uses secondary data sources, such as the District Census Handbook for the periods, *viz.*, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 and the provisional figures of the Census 2011 pertaining to the socio-economic and demographic profile of the three study villages. Secondary as well as empirical data are presented and discussed in terms of simple descriptive statistics.

### ***1.3. Analytical framework***

Like many other theoretical formulations impinging on the process of migration as developed by researchers across disciplines, the process of peasant migration is also being conceptualised as an outcome of a variety of push and pull factors. It may be noted that the neo-classical framework has been regarded as a dominant approach in explaining the causes of migration with its underlying assumption that migration is stimulated primarily by individualistic rational economic considerations of relative benefits and costs, mostly financial and psychological (Todaro and Smith, 2006). However, the

neoclassical theory has been subjected to criticism on conceptual (Arango, 2000) as well as on empirical grounds (Massey *et al.*, 1998). On the other hand, the human capital theory of migration as postulated by Sjaadstad (1962) tried to enrich the neoclassical framework by incorporating the socio-demographic characteristics of the individual as an important determinant of migration at the micro-level (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999). This formulation presumes that a migrant is a rational individual who migrates with the goal of maximizing his or her benefits and gains and the human capital endowments, like skills, age, marital status, gender, occupation, and labor market status as well as preferences and expectations strongly influence the migration decisions.

Still neither the neo-classical nor the human capital frameworks were seen to be acceptable to many scholars, including Collinson (2009), who suggested the need for proper integration of these two approaches with livelihoods approach and the relational political economy approach. This integrated approach, in turn, was proposed to help scholars capture ‘the interaction of local-level factors immediately influencing people’s migration decisions and strategies (linked to livelihoods) with a range of political, economic and social factors and processes affecting the agency of migrants that ultimately shape migration outcomes within specific contexts’ (Collinson 2009, as cited in Kurekova, 2011: 17).

While the above theoretical positions shed light on the critical considerations that affect migration decisions of individuals and households, it may be argued that the question of peasant migration from the erstwhile Travancore to Malabar as happened in Kerala in the 1940s through 1980s is much more nuanced and needs to be explained in terms of the *vent for surplus* framework as originally developed by Tella (1982) and later refined by Findlay and Lundahl (1994). To elaborate, the peasant migration was greatly attracted by the vast and abundant land frontier available in the place of destination (erstwhile Malabar regions). As we discuss later, this process of peasant migration lured by the *vent for surplus* has been further stimulated by institutional intermediations by the state as well as socio-religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church and the Royal family. While the socio-religious institutions have offered the much needed social capital as well as networking support, the state acted as a catalyst in the process of agrarian transformation (especially development and expansion of commercial agriculture) by providing a legal and institutional apparatus to enforce property rights and control over resources and by providing public utilities, services and infrastructure development to the peasants.

Further, drawing from the political ecology theory, we also argue that the distinctive nature of agrarian transformation consequent on migration, has resulted in the consolidation of land frontier by the migrant farmers and evolution of a monoculture (genetically homogeneous) plantation agriculture dominated by rubber production, which potentially contained the seeds of destruction of the mixed and the diversified (genetically heterogeneous) cropping systems that existed in the region. As will be discussed in the forthcoming section, the rubber plantation based agriculture dominated by rubber cultivation by the small and marginal producers in particular, tended to compete with the subsistence based non-capitalist agricultural practices in the region, which was overtly facilitated by the state and other institutional agencies over time. From a long-term perspective, such an agrarian transformation might turn out to be unsustainable in terms of agro-ecological integrity on the one hand and the livelihood security of the migrant households, on the other.

The paper is structured as follows. Section two provides an overview of the socio-economic and demographic profile and transformation occurred in the three study villages. It then presents the analysis of survey data describing the profile of the sample households, the educational as well as occupational shift of the households across generations. Section three explores the process of agrarian transformation triggered by migration in the three villages, the influence of various socio-economic, political and institutional factors in promoting a paradigm shift in cropping pattern towards monoculture rubber and other cash crops. Section four discusses the reflections of the households as regards the agrarian changes and their likely implications for future farming practices and livelihood security. Section five concludes the paper by highlighting the relevance of the findings of the present study with respect to policies and interventions in the specific context of the drastic changes in landuse in the Malabar region in general and the migrant villages in particular.

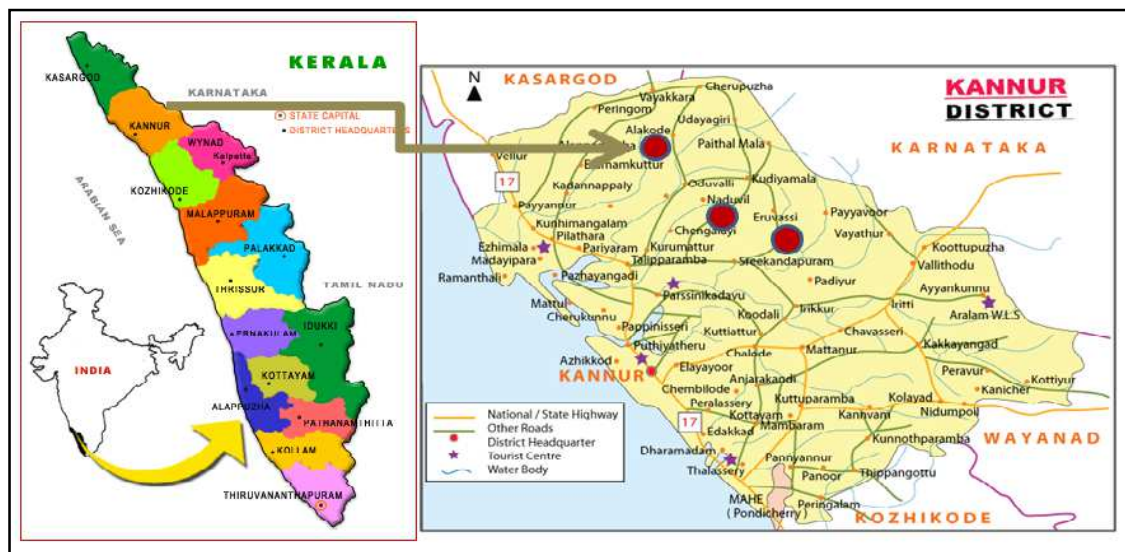
## **2. Socio-economic change in the villages and assets status of migrant households**

Tracing the history of migration from Travancore to Malabar takes us to the early 1920s, when the exodus started and continued upto the 1970s or even to 1980s when almost the whole area of the uncultivated wastelands were occupied by the peasant immigrants as noted by Joseph (1988, 2002 ). The distance travelled by majority of the immigrants was more than 300 kms away from their native villages and settled in the hinterlands of the erstwhile Malabar district, which included prominent taluks, such as Kanjirapuzha in Attappady in Wynad district, Chungathara in Nilambur Taluk in Malappuram district, Thiruvambady- Kodenchery and Maruthankara- Chakkittupara regions in Kuttiadi in

Kozhikode district, Peravoor, Alakode and Cherupuzha regions in Taliparamba Taluk in Kannur district and Panathady-Eleri regions in Hosdurg Taluk in Karnataka, etc (Joseph, 1988).

Though the migrant farmers are spread out in the Malabar region as noted, for the present study, the sample survey was undertaken only in three villages in the Taliparamba taluk in Kannur district, viz., Naduvil, Eruvessy and Alakode (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Map showing the location of study villages in Kannur district, Kerala**



*Note:* The names of sample villages are shaded in red (round shapes).

*Source:* Maps of India

In fact, the various studies on peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar uniformly highlight the push and pull factors that paved the way for immigration of farmers. In most cases the areas that the migrants settled were cultivable wastelands, including junglelands located in the interior parts of the region. These areas were also highly susceptible to epidemics, like malaria, which dissuaded the natives in settling down in these areas and pursue a settled life. On the other hand, the farmers who opted to migrate to Malabar were also facing acute food shortage during the Second World War and were thus searching for options of survival, resulting in mass migration with families, kith and kin in most cases.

However, there exists a clear vacuum as regards the extent and magnitude of farmer migration from Travancore to Malabar captured in pure statistical terms. In the absence of a systematic collation and compilation of statistics and assessments done by the state or other agencies, it is difficult to arrive at the realistic estimates of the volume of



migrants from Travancore to Malabar. An exception in this regard was the 1971 Census, which provides some important evidence regarding the increase in Christian population in Malabar region between the 1931 and 1971 Census. The Census report shows that the total Christian population in Malabar region was 442510 in 1971, as against 31191 as per the 1931 Census, thus showing a fifteen fold increase in the number of migrants in the region. The Directory of Catholic Diocese of Tellicherry also supports this point indicating that the catholic population in the diocese had increased from 123219 in 1960 to 292815 in 1971, registering an increase of almost 138 per cent (Directory of Diocese of Tellicherry for 1960 and 1971).

The three villages selected for the study (Figure 1) reported a combined total population of 72758 with the highest share in Alakode (46%), followed by Naduvil village (28%) and Eruvessy (26%). In terms of increase in population over time, Eruvessy reported an increase of 8.3% between the 1991 and 2011 Census, followed by Naduvil (6.5%) and Alakode (6.4%).

As per the Census reports, there has been significant improvement in literacy rates in the villages over the past six rounds of Census, i.e., 1961 to 2011. By and large, the overall literacy rate had increased from 50% during 1961 to almost 87% during 2011, with a notable reduction in gender gap in literacy rates, leading to a close in gender gap by 2011. The Census 2011 data further reveals that the average family size hovers around little over 4 members per household, which approximates a typical nuclear family of present Kerala, comprising the parents and two children in most cases. The proportion of full-time cultivators (as percentage of main workers) was quite low in the range of 6-14% across the three villages, which is slightly above the proportion of cultivators at the state level (9.3%) as per the 2011 Census. The proportion of agricultural labourers was the highest in Naduvil village (15%), compared to Eruvessy (14%) and the lowest in Alakode (4%). Quite interestingly, the proportion of females to total main workers was highest and close to 30% in all the three villages, which indicates the active presence of women in the labour market.

Table 1 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the sample households. Notably, almost 93% of the sample households belong to Christian community. On an average, a household currently owns about 5 acres of land in all the villages with a marginal exception in case of Eruvessy. The average age of the farmer was 56 years with differences across villages, i.e., highest in Naduvil (60 years) and lowest in Eruvessy (53 years).

**Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of the sample households**

Household characteristics	Naduvil (n=50)	Eruvessy (n=50)	Alakode (n=50)	Overall (n=150)
1. Christian Households (%)	92	94	94	93
2. Household size (acres)	4.70	4.52	4.76	4.66
3. Average age of the respondent (years)	60.2 (19.3)	52.6 (22.4)	55.4 (18.6)	56.1 (20.6)
4. Generation of migrant households (%)				
(a) First	28	32	24	28
(b) Second	64	50	56	57
(c) Third	8	18	20	15
5. Total land possessed (acres)	661.9	741.5	509.5	1912.9
6. Average land currently owned (acres)	13.24	14.83	10.19	12.75
7. Average land at place of origin (acres)	2.31	2.81	3.64	2.92
8. Households having				
(a) Two plots (%)	86.0	90.0	90.0	88.7
(b) Three plots or more (%)	34.0	28.0	30.0	30.7
9. Land owned per-capita (acres)	2.82	3.28	2.14	2.74

*Note:* Figures in parentheses indicate the Co-efficient of Variation values.

*Source:* Sample survey data.

Majority of the sample farmers represent the second generation migrants (57%), the highest being in Naduvil (64%). Larger numbers of first generation farmers were surveyed from Eruvessy (32%) and Naduvil (28%), while more number of third generation farmers is found in Alakode (20%) and Eruvessy (18%). There was a notable change in the land ownership status of the farmers between the place of origin (Travancore) and the place of destination. For instance, the average size of land that the migrant farmers could buy in the villages was more than five times in Naduvil and Eruvessy and almost three times higher in Alakode. Farmers in Eruvessy village reported the highest average size of land (14.83 acres) currently under possession and farmers in Alakode reported the lowest (10.19 acres).

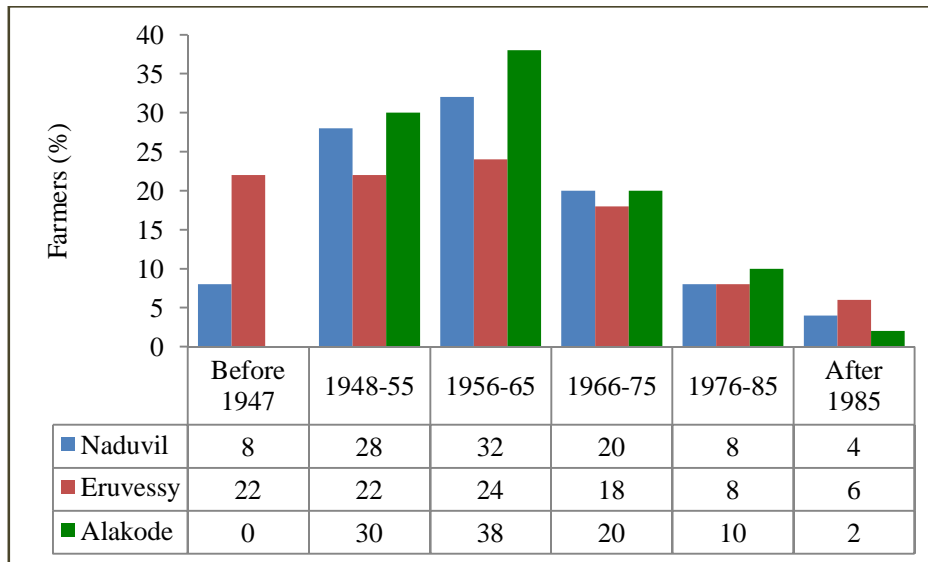
While almost 89% of the farmers own at least two plots, about 31% own three plots or more. However, on a per-capita basis, the land owned by the farmers is hardly about 3 acres (2.74 acres), with farmers in Eruvessy reporting the highest per-capita access to land (3.28 acres).

### ***2.1.Period and place of origin of migrants***

A snapshot of the period of migration as reported by the migrants reveals that majority of the farmers (77%) have migrated to Malabar during the period between 1948-55 to 1965-75 with some variations across the three villages. For instance, while about 22% of the

respondents have migrated to Eruvessy before 1947, about 38% of the farmers in Alakode reported that they migrated during the decade, 1956-65 (Figure 2). As evident from Figure 2, almost 96% of the respondents have migrated before 1986.

**Figure 2: Period of migration to Malabar as reported by the farmers (%)**



Source: Sample survey data.

Almost 76% of the migrants have been original inhabitants from the taluks of Meenachil, Changanassery, Kottayam, Kattappana, Kanjirapally, Vaikom and Vazhoor taluks of Kottayam district. While another 14% of the migrants were from Thodupuzha, Peermedu and Idukki taluks of Idukki district, rest of the migrants were thinly spread across different taluks of Ernakulam, Pathanamthitta, Kannur and Kozhikode districts.

## ***2.2. Educational and occupational shift***

One of the important initial developments triggered by the migration process was the development of educational infrastructure in the villages, such that the migrants could educate their children and thereby progress in economic and social life. The importance of education was felt, as at least a small fragment of the migrants also had training in teaching (with basic and advanced degrees) at the time of migration. This advantage along with the patronage by the Christian missionary and the Royal family had enabled the villages to set up primary and secondary schools within a shorter span of time<sup>3</sup>. The

<sup>3</sup> The Official documents of the Corporate Educational Agency, Arch Diocese of Thalassery indicate that in 54 migrant localities surveyed, about 72% had Lower Primary Schools, 57% localities had Upper Primary Schools and 43% had High Schools established during the period between 1950 and 1983 and all these schools are aided by the State government.

improvements in educational infrastructure facilities within/ nearby the village locations have invariably resulted in a significant shift in educational achievements of the households with better human development outcomes as also highlighted by others<sup>4</sup> (Sebastian, 2008).

**Table 2: Comparison of educational status of households [first, second and third generations] (%)**

Educational level	First generation (n=38)	Second & third generations (n=673)
1. Upto Secondary	35.4	19.8
2. Up to SSLC	30.0	22.4
3. High Secondary/Pre-Degree	18.7	22.3
4. Graduation	11.3	17.3
5. Nursing degree	--	6.7
6. BEd./MEd.	2.0	4.2
7. Engineering (B.Tech/M.Tech)	--	2.2
8. Computer (BCA/MCA)	--	1.9
9. MBA/ Post graduation	--	1.3
10. Medical (BAMS/MBBS/BDS)	--	1.0
11. Diploma/ ITI	2.6	0.7
12. CA/LLB	--	0.2

*Source:* Sample survey data.

A comparison of the educational status of the first generation migrants with rest of the generations as presented in Table 2 reveals that almost 65% of the first generation migrants were educated up to secondary or up to the tenth standard. Whereas, this proportion was only 42% in case of second and third generation household members, indicating that a notable proportion of the family members have shifted towards higher qualifications. The combined proportion of second and third generation members with higher qualifications, such as higher secondary and graduation was almost 40% compared to 30% in case of first generation members. While there are no first generation members with professional qualifications, such as nursing, medical, engineering and computer education, the proportion in case of second and third generation members is 18%.

Thus, education has been a major factor in improving the socio-economic status of the households, which in turn, enabled them occupy lucrative jobs outside the villages or

<sup>4</sup> The movement towards better scores in human development was mainly due to the widespread school facilities over the migrant belt, which opened the avenues for institutional education at least up to 7<sup>th</sup> standard at an accessible reachable distance of the households in the villages. In this case, the parental motivation along with increased access to the educational infrastructure facilities played a significant role in attaining a relatively better educational level by the third generation (Sebastian, 2008).



even outside the state or country. While the first and second generation members may have restricted themselves from getting into better educational pursuits due to lack of financial resources, the third generation members have reportedly attained higher educational qualifications with significant positive impacts on the social and economic status of the families. The improved educational status also impacted on the family in terms of adoption of family planning measures and there are reports (for eg., Sebastian, 2008) of instances in which employed mothers have left their paid occupations for providing better care to their children.

Table 3 indicates the occupational shift between the first and later generations of the migrant households in the three villages.

**Table 3: Occupational shift between the respondents and household members**

Occupation	Occupational status - respondents (%)				Occupational status - Household members (%)			
	NDVL (n=50)	ERVSY (n=50)	ALKD (n=50)	Overall (n=150)	NDVL (n=88)	ERVSY (n=85)	ALKD (n=91)	Overall (n=264)
1. Agri./ agri. Labour	96.0	82.0	86.0	87.3	29.4	23.5	23.1	25.4
2. Teacher	2.0	5.0	2.0	3.1	10.2	9.4	12.2	11.0
3. Govt. service	---	2.0	2.0	1.4	2.3	2.4	4.4	3.0
4. Household/ H. wife	---	1.0	4.0	2.2	55.7	62.3	55.0	56.1
5. Small business	---	6.0	4.0	3.3	2.4	1.2	4.2	3.7
6. Retired	2.0	4.0	2.0	2.7	0.0	1.2	1.1	0.8

*Note:* NDVL – Naduvil, ERVSY – Eruvessy, ALKD – Alakode.

*Source:* Sample survey data.

Apparently, an overwhelming majority (87%) of the respondents are engaged in agriculture and agriculture labour occupations with the highest percentage reported from Naduvil (96%). On the other hand, the proportion of household members (second and third generations) engaged in agriculture and agricultural labour activities is hardly 25%, though Naduvil village reports a highest percentage (29%). The proportions of family members engaged in other occupations, such as teaching, government service and small business are also reasonably higher than the respondents. A sizeable proportion of the female household members are engaged in household work, which may be a choice preferred by them due to the overall socio-economic improvement in the family.

The current occupational profile of the household members is much more diverse as evident from Table 4. While a larger proportion of the household members are children and engaged in studies (62%), about 20% members are working as nurses; 6% working as engineers and about 3% into social work. The household members are also engaged

into other important professional pursuits, such as doctors, lab technicians, advocates and computer operators.

**Table 4: Occupational profile of household members (%)**

Occupation	Naduvil (n=41)	Eruvessy (n=82)	Alakode (n=65)	Overall (n=188)
1. Students	48.8	74.4	62.1	61.7
2. Nurse	22.0	20.7	18.5	20.2
3. Engineer	12.2	1.2	4.9	6.3
4. Social work	7.3	1.2	1.2	3.4
5. Lab tech.	1.2	1.2	4.2	2.5
6. Doctor	2.4	1.2	2.0	2.1
7. Advocate	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.5
8. Computer	2.3	0.0	2.9	1.5
9. Accountant	3.8	0.0	2.7	1.8

*Source:* Sample survey data.

Thus, the above analysis of educational as well as occupational status of the respondents and their household members clearly demonstrates a major shift in educational status and occupational pursuits. As the analysis in the next section would reveal, the migration has enabled the farmers to acquire more land in the Malabar villages at cheaper rates. In fact, some portions of the proceeds from sales of land at destination were simultaneously invested in raising cash crops, like rubber and in education, which in due course paid rich dividends to the migrant households.

As evident from Table 5, majority of the households were able to consolidate their economic status by possessing various household assets, including construction of concrete houses by using the income earned primarily from cash crop/ rubber cultivation. The migrant households almost show similar pattern in terms of all the household assets/ amenities as listed in the Table. Exceptions may be seen in case of households in Eruvessy village in respect of use of LPG for cooking and possession of desktop. In Eruvessy, large number of households still uses combination of LPG and firewood for cooking unlike Naduvil or Alakode. The overall asset index (OAI) of the households is 0.64 with highest asset value reported by households in Alakode (0.68) and lowest in case of Eruvessy (0.60).

**Table 5: Ownership status of household assets in the villages**

Assets	Naduvil	Eruvessy	Alakode	Overall
1. Concrete house	84.0	95.1	92.0	90.1
2. LPG for cooking	89.1	46.9	83.0	72.5
3. Firewood & LPG	6.5	34.7	14.9	19.0
4. Television	92.0	89.6	84.0	88.5
5. Mobile sets > 1	72.0	80.0	78.0	76.7
6. Desktop	48.0	32.0	48.0	42.7
7. Laptop	70.8	50.0	79.2	68.8
8. Vehicles	66.0	64.0	72.0	67.3
9. Car	48.5	46.9	58.3	51.5
Overall Asset Index	0.64	0.60	0.68	0.64

Source: Sample survey data.

### 3. Plantation development and agrarian transformation in the Malabar villages

As argued, the peasant migration was greatly influenced by the desire to acquire more land at destination and develop an agriculture system that generates adequate surplus for reinvestment in agriculture and betterment of livelihoods through expansion of human capital. This process of migration lured by the *vent for surplus* has been further facilitated by institutional intermediations by the state as well as socio-religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church and the Royal family. While the socio-religious institutions have offered the much needed social capital as well as networking support, the state acted as a catalyst in the process of agrarian transformation (especially development and expansion of commercial agriculture) by providing a legal and institutional apparatus to enforce property rights and control over resources and by providing public utilities, services and infrastructure development to the farmers.

The availability of vast tracts of unoccupied cultivable wastelands as well as degraded forest lands was the major attraction, as it was reported that only 60% of the total arable land was brought under cultivation at that time in Malabar (Joseph, 1988). At the same time, the situation in Travancore was different and almost all available land was intensively utilized by the peasants through state supported land grant policies and Christian inheritance system leading to fragmentation of holdings (Varghese, 1970; Tharakan, 1977, 1981). The persistent food shortage consequent on the world war also acted as a major push factor for the farmers to migrate to the Malabar, where, land was abundantly available.

However, compared to Travancore<sup>5</sup> and Cochin, agriculture was least developed in Malabar. There were several reasons indicated for the virtual absence of a dynamic agriculture development in the region before Independence. Primarily, the British land revenue policy put the land revenue much higher for Malabar than that in Travancore and Cochin (Varghese, 1979), which resulted in the peasants losing a major share of their farm surplus as land revenue. Further, the trade monopoly held by the British on commodities, such as salt, tobacco, timber and spices had worsened the crisis by affecting the day today life of the peasants in Malabar, as they had to pay higher prices for buying them. Moreover, the cultivable wastelands were junglelands and were inaccessible and prone to infectious diseases, such as malaria and threats from wild animals (Slater 1918). The native were unwilling and less inclined to have such encounters involving money and effort. Under these circumstances, the native peasantry remained discontented and never ventured to make agriculture a dynamic activity (Panickar, 1989). There were some scholars (Thomas Shea, 1959), who even argued that the rigidity that existed in the Hindu caste system (Hindus being the vast majority in the region) acted as a major barrier in the overall development, including agriculture in the region. The prevalence of domination of landlords was yet another important factor that dissuaded the tenants from expansion of commercial agriculture in the region, which was quite distinct from other regions<sup>6</sup>.

As agriculture was not well developed, it was reported that paddy was the most extensively grown crop in the Malabar region as a staple grain along with a variety of annual/ seasonal subsistence crops. At the same time, certain parts of the region, like Wynad, were also growing some important commercial/ cash crops, like pepper, coconut, cardamom, ginger, coffee, tea, etc<sup>7</sup>, portions of which were also exported to the European markets<sup>8</sup>. By and large, the growth of commercial crops had also resulted in the decline of traditional crops, such as paddy and there were even reports of rice imports by using

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<sup>5</sup> In Travancore, the British capital and enterprise initiated plantation agriculture way back in the early 1990s. The state administration took active interest in the promotion of cash or plantation crops and issued policy measures to this effect (Pandian, 1990, Tharakan, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Kannan (1988) attributes this to the inability of the political development process in Malabar in containing the domination of landlords, while the case of Travancore was entirely different in terms of progressively reducing such dominance of landlords, thereby leading to peasant proprietorship and stimulating the expansion of cash crops along with investment in agriculture.

<sup>7</sup> In Malabar, the plantation based agriculture evolved around 1840's with the cultivation of coffee and tea in Wynad. Reportedly, there were 80 planters by 1859 and 10,000 acres were under coffee in Wynad in 1862, mostly owned by European proprietary planters (Dick Kooiman, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s, and beginning even earlier, Malabar had begun to outstrip south-east Asia to become the largest supplier of pepper and coconut to European markets. Even rice, which was considered as a 'subsistence' crop, was part of a trading network of Malabar region along the coast to the Bay of Bengal and south-east Asia (Gopinath, 1987; Menon, 1992, 1997).



the surplus from cash crops in the 1930s. As a result, there was an attempt to return to the cultivation of paddy and, by 1940, a major part of the land available was allocated for rice cultivation. Thus, it may be concluded that any systematic approach towards development of commercial agriculture by way of investments was somewhat absent in the entire region<sup>9</sup> until the migrants from Travancore had arrived in Malabar. The migrants in turn, had already acquired sufficient experience in plantation agriculture from Travancore by virtue of the promotional policies of the British and the proactive state administration.

As noted, the migrant farmers had large unoccupied cultivable areas at their disposal to venture into farming of their choice. Reportedly, they even cleared virgin forest lands that remained undisturbed for centuries<sup>10</sup>. Thus, migration had brought in major agrarian transformation in the Malabar region in terms of a drastic change in the cropping pattern from that existed earlier. To start with, the experience in rubber cultivation that the migrants had garnered from Travancore made them plant rubber extensively, including the hilly tracts (Tharakan, 1984). Though initially the inexperienced farmers were reluctant to start rubber cultivation, the state policy along with the planting subsidies and other support measures as provided by the Rubber Board have been instrumental in expanding the rubber area in the region on a large scale. As a result, rubber, which was ranked as the third major crop (after paddy and pepper) during 1934-35, had emerged as the top ranking crop in many of the Malabar villages by the 1970s (Joseph, 1988), which still continues unparalleled.

### ***3.1. Cropping pattern changes: Macro and micro level evidences***

The fact that rubber had emerged as the prominent crop in the Malabar region is also reflective of the general growth trend observed for rubber at the state level over the past 3-4 decades in particular. The aggregate level trends in rubber area planted by smallholdings and estates in the North Kerala districts, comprising Malappuram, Wynad, Kannur, Kozhikode and Kasargod indicate that the area under smallholdings had increased by almost 9 times from merely 16,000 ha during 1960-61 to 1.44 lakh ha during 2011-12. In relative terms, the share of area under smallholdings had increased from 55% to 95% between the two periods (Figure 3). Currently, these five North Kerala

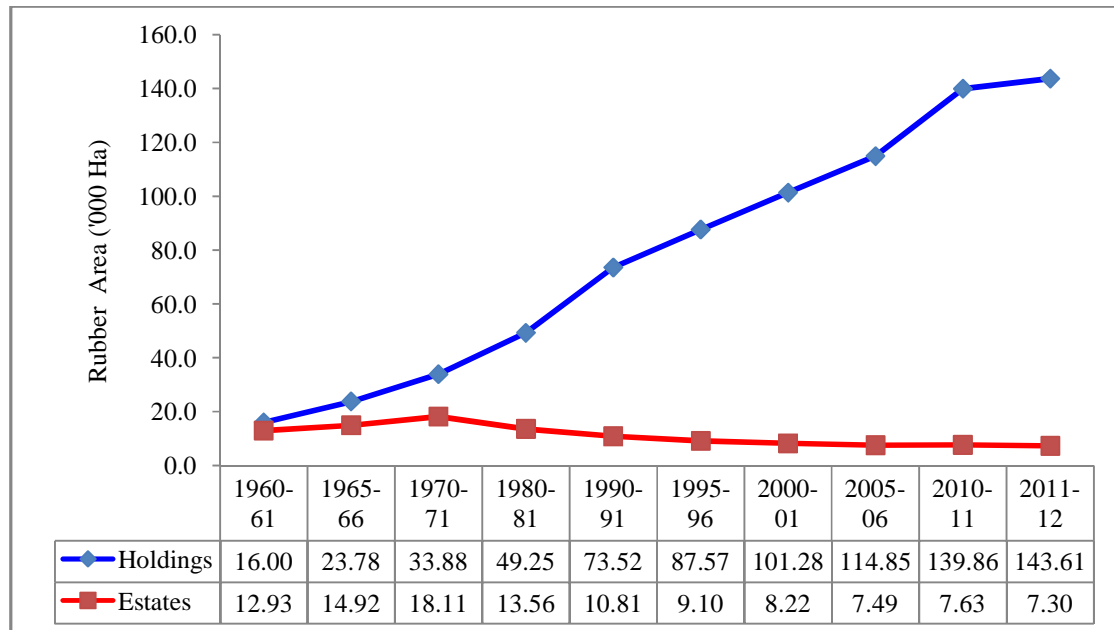
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<sup>9</sup> It was reported that by early 1930s, Malabar region was growing tea in about 12,000 acres in Wynad (Prakash, 1988), while the total area under coffee, tea and rubber did not exceed 29,000 acres, which constituted hardly 2% of the total cultivated area of the region (Innes, 1951).

<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, the forest lands converted in Malabar for development of plantations were much higher than that in Travancore during the period 1940-1970 (Sreedhara Menon, 1972).

districts account for about 28% of the total rubber area and 26% of rubber production in the state. The area share of North Kerala would further go up to 34% if rubber area of Palakkad is added to this list.

**Figure 3: Trends in Rubber area under Smallholdings and Estates in North Kerala, 1961 to 2011 (Hectares)**



*Note:* The figures include rubber area in Malappuram, Kannur, Kasargod, Kozhikode and Wynad districts.  
*Source:* Calculated from Indian Rubber Statistics, various volumes.

An interesting piece of work by Joseph (2002) examining the interface between migration and changing land use pattern in 26 Malabar villages, traces the dynamic growth of rubber in the agrarian landscape over the past six decades, as evident from Table 6.

**Table 6: Area grown with different crops by early migrants in Malabar villages (%)**

Crops	Before 1940	1941-50	1951-60	1961-70	1971-80	1997
1. Rice	23.40	13.46	9.63	8.77	2.19	6.91
2. Tapioca	14.89	12.01	10.84	10.01	6.76	0.68
3. Coconut	4.25	14.30	21.12	20.00	12.19	22.43
4. Arecanut	8.51	4.64	12.40	10.27	13.12	11.36
5. Rubber	---	0.96	2.45	4.25	22.96	32.48
6. Pepper	---	6.36	8.08	11.22	14.34	5.71
7. Others*	48.95	48.29	35.50	35.49	28.46	20.43

*Note:* \* Others include ginger, coffee, cocoa, lemongrass, cashew, vegetables, etc  
*Source:* Compiled from Joseph, 2002.

Based on the cropping pattern adopted by the migrants at different points of time, the Table indicates some interesting aspects of land use change in the Malabar villages. For

instance, rice cultivation was predominantly followed by majority (23%) before 1940 and over time, it had lost its importance in the region. Tapioca was the second major crop grown by the farmers and it also lost its relative position from 15% before 1940 to below 1% by 1997. Notably, rubber emerged as the major crop from less than 1% during the 1940s to almost 23% during the 1970s and by 1997, its share had further increased to about 32.5%. While coconut continued to be the second major crop, the share of arecanut remained more or less stagnant at about 11-12% during the period since 1951. Pepper was another major crop that lost its standing in the cropping pattern in the region. The combined share of crops, such as ginger, coffee, cocoa, lemongrass, vegetables and cashew had also marked a sharp decline from almost half of the reported area to about 20% during 1997. These trends demonstrate that there was a dramatic shift in the cropping pattern in the region towards perennial cash crops, like rubber and coconut and this had adversely affected the seasonal/ annual food crops, especially, rice, vegetables and tapioca.

In the light of the brief discussion about the migration induced agrarian changes in Malabar as provided by various researchers, we now examine the specific agrarian changes as reported by the sample households in the three study villages. Table 7 presents the village-wise status of major crops grown by the sample farmers immediately after migration. Since the farmers grew more than one crop in their farm plots, the data presented in the Table are the results of multiple responses. Majority of the farmers had initially started growing several crops, of which, coconut, tapioca and rice were quite widely adopted as revealed by more than 60% of the farmer responses. While cashew was another major crop, sweet potato and arecanut were also grown with some differences across the three villages.

**Table 7: Cropping pattern adopted at the time of migration in the villages**

Crops	Percentage of multiple responses			
	Naduvil	Eruvessy	Alakode	Overall
1. Coconut	60.0	60.0	70.0	63.3
2. Tapioca	68.0	78.0	44.0	63.3
3. Rice	68.0	76.0	38.0	60.7
4. Cashew	50.0	32.0	64.0	48.7
5. Sweet potato	36.0	14.0	6.0	18.7
6. Arecanut	14.0	14.0	26.0	18.0
7. Others & mixed	6.0	2.0	16.0	8.0
Total* (n)	151	138	132	421

Note: \* - Relates to the total number of multiple responses in each village.

Source: Sample survey data.

There were also notable differences in the relative share of area grown with the important crops, as shown in Table 8. For instance, rice area had occupied about 36% of the total area across villages, followed by coconut (31%), tapioca (14%) and sweet potato (13%). Crops, such as arecanut and cashew were grown in very small fraction of areas (3.8% and 1.7% respectively).

**Table 8: Relative share of major crops grown by farmers at the time of migration**

Crops	Naduvil (%)	Eruvessy (%)	Alakode (%)	Overall (%)
1. Rice	32.6	43.9	26.4	36.3
2. Coconut	26.3	28.5	46.8	30.9
3. Tapioca	4.9	21.2	16.8	13.9
4. Sweet Potato	31.4	0.8	0.9	13.0
5. Arecanut	3.5	3.1	6.4	3.8
6. Cashew	1.4	1.5	2.7	1.7
7. Others	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.4
Total (acres)	245.5 (100.0)	259.5 (100.0)	110.0 (100.0)	615.0 (100.0)

*Source:* Sample survey data.

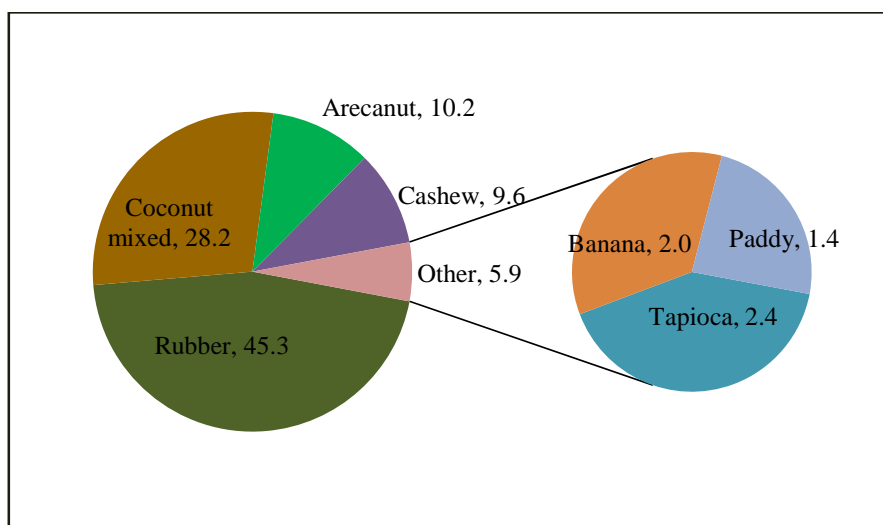
From the above analysis, it may be concluded that in the initial years of migration, the farmers had mainly concentrated on food crops, such as rice, tapioca and sweet potato, so that they do not run any risk of food shortage while settling down in the region. At the same time, they also grew commercial/ cash crops, such as coconut, arecanut and cashew so that they could earn additional income for improving the socio-economic conditions.

Apparently, it may also be observed that the farmers might have started growing rubber in the succeeding years, either by acquiring more land or replacing the crops that were initially grown. This is also corroborated by the farmer responses that a large number of them started growing rubber in the second or third year after migration, as they wanted to acclimatize with the local environment or even learn from the experience of other farmers, who had migrated earlier and started growing rubber. This could also be because of the fact that the farmers were to mobilize the initial capital investment along with the necessary preparations for seeking institutional support (planting subsidy and others) from the Rubber Board.

Given this growth scenario, it is not surprising that the relative share of the crop in the villages would be much higher as compared to many other crops. In fact, this is also

corroborated by an earlier survey undertaken by the author<sup>11</sup>. This survey, covering 804 farmers in the three wards of Eruvessy Panchayat, viz., Nellikutty, Cheriya Areekamala and Valiya Areekamala, during 1998 provides strong indications of monoculture rubber commanding its dominance in the cropping pattern in the interiors of the villages. It was observed from the survey results (Figure 4) that rubber has been the single largest crop occupying about 45% of the total cropped area of 1300 ha of the three wards in the Eruvessy Panchayat.

**Figure 4: Cropping pattern in select wards of Eruvessy Panchayat, 1998**



Source: Survey undertaken by the Economic Research Division, Rubber Research Institute of India in the three wards of Eruvessy Panchayat during 1998.

The second major landuse was coconut mixed holdings spread across 28% of the area, followed by arecanut (10%), cashew (9.6%) and other crops, such as tapioca, banana and paddy. These results while indicating the dominance of rubber, also brings out the virtual collapse of the food crop based agriculture that existed in the village prior to the immigration of the farmers.

In order to capture the current cropping pattern in the region as well as in the study villages, we have examined two data sources. The first data source is the Land Resources Information System (LRIS), which is a web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) initiated by Kerala State Land Use Board (KSLUB) in 2013<sup>12</sup>. Accordingly, this dataset

<sup>11</sup> This survey was undertaken as part of a research study on “Operational Efficiency of Rubber Smallholdings in Kerala”, undertaken by the Economic Research Division, Rubber Research Institute of India, Kottayam.

<sup>12</sup> This data source provides a snapshot of the important landuse categories for different blocks coming under the administrative jurisdiction of various districts of Kerala. Currently, this landuse data is available for seven districts, viz., Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Kannur, Wynad and

provides the latest landuse information for different blocks of seven districts, including Kannur.

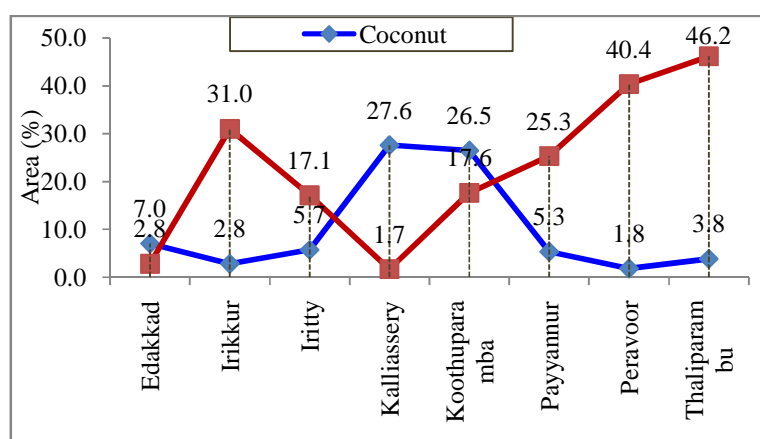
The results emerge from the dataset are presented in Table 9 (also see Figure 5). It shows that the relative share of rubber in the reported total cropped area is the highest in the Taliparamba block (at 46%), where the study villages are located. Rubber also holds the first position in Taliparamba. While coconut has major share only in two blocks, rubber is the second major crop in five of the eight blocks listed as evident from Figure 5, and these five blocks are also known to have larger concentration of farmer migrants from Central Kerala.

**Table 9: Current cropping pattern in the selected blocks in Kannur District**

Blocks	Relative share (%) of crops in the total cropped area reported							Total cropped area –Ha (%)
	Coconut	Rubber	Mixed crops	Paddy	Cashew	Pepper	Arecanut	
1. Edakkad	7.04	2.82	87.32	1.41	1.41	---	---	10011 (100.0)
2. Irikkur	2.82	30.99	45.07	0.00	19.72	1.41	---	29376 (100.0)
3. Iritty	5.71	17.14	68.57	0.00	5.71	2.86	---	13634 (100.0)
4. Kalliassery	27.59	1.72	63.79	5.17	1.72	---	---	8506 (100.0)
5. Koothuparamba	26.47	17.65	8.82	2.94	32.35	---	11.76	5941 (100.0)
6. Payyannur	5.33	25.33	50.67	4.00	10.67	---	4.00	24875 (100.0)
7. Peravoor	1.83	40.37	45.87	2.75	9.17	---	---	21410 (100.0)
8. Taliparamba	3.85	46.15	26.92	1.92	11.54	7.69	1.92	27778 (100.0)
Total area	6.63	25.89	51.46	1.90	10.83	1.87	1.42	157156 (100.0)

Source: Compiled from LRIS data set, Kerala Land Use Board.

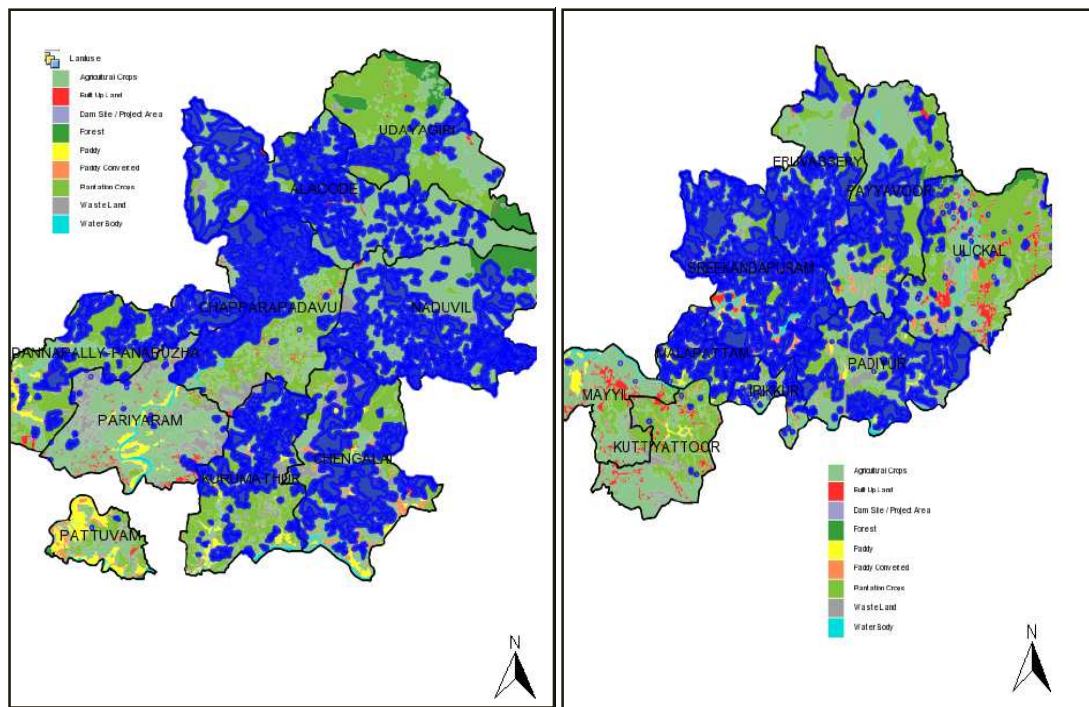
**Figure 5: Current share of Rubber and Coconut in the selected blocks in Kannur District**



Source: Derived from LRIS dataset, Kerala Land Use Board.

Kasargod. This dataset has been developed by combining manual data gathered through the Panchayat resource mappings (PRM) and information from satellites (<http://kslublrisk.com/LRIS/Kerala/district.php>).

**Figure 6: Spread of rubber area in the Taliparamba block, including the study areas**



*Note:* Rubber spread area is indicated by the blue colour across the Panchayats, including the study areas.  
*Source:* Maps generated by the author from the LRIS dataset, Kerala Land Use Board.

To further show the intensity of rubber cultivation in the Panchayats located in Taliparamba block, including the study villages, we also have plotted the rubber spread area based on the web based GIS maps as available from the LRIS dataset. The maps so generated are presented in Figure 6. The Figure shows that rubber is widely spread across most of the Panchayats in the Taliparamba block as indicated by the blue shaded patches. Amongst the three study areas, the spread of rubber is quite intense in Alakode and Naduvil (first map), while it is relatively lesser in Eruvessy (second map) village.

These trends as emerge from the LRIS dataset has been further substantiated by the landuse data provided by the Agriculture Department (Krishi Bhavan) in respect of the three study villages as seen from Table 10. As evident, rubber occupies the largest share (48%) at the aggregate level with the highest share reported from Alakode (58%), followed by Eruvessy (55%). Rice is reported to be non-existent in all the three villages.



**Table 10: Cropping pattern in the study villages, 2012-13**

Crops	Share of important crops in Total Cropped Area (%)			
	Naduvil	Eruvessy	Alakode	Overall
1. Rubber	38.37	54.71	58.25	48.14
2. Coconut & mixed	33.68	22.31	25.27	28.70
3. Rice	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.02
4. Arecanut	7.67	1.92	6.61	6.22
5. Cashew	9.54	12.26	0.59	7.06
6. Pepper	3.11	3.82	2.94	3.19
7. Tapioca	0.83	0.70	0.51	0.70
8. Ginger	0.00	0.12	0.15	0.07
9. Banana	6.74	1.45	5.29	5.25
10. Vegetables	0.03	0.34	0.32	0.19
11. Others	1.35	2.32	0.07	1.11
Total Cropped Area (ha)	9643.0 (100.0)	3873.5 (100.0)	6807.0 (100.0)	20323.5 (100.0)

*Source:* Data gathered from Basic Landuse Register, respective Krishi Bhavan offices.

The above results are also authenticated by our empirical survey examining the current cropping pattern in the three villages. The results of the assessment of current cropping pattern as reported by the farmers in the three villages are presented in Table 11.

Quite interestingly, the relative share of rubber is about 48% at the aggregate level with the highest percentage reported from farmers in Naduvil village (54%), followed by Alakode (48%). As observed from Figure 6, the share of rubber is relatively lesser in Eruvessy village (40%). Coconut assumes the second largest share in the cropping pattern in all the three villages, with Alakode reporting the highest share (40%). Among the other major crops listed, arecanut occupies about 11% of the area with Eruvessy village reporting the largest share (23%). The shares of crops, such as cashew and banana are insignificant in all the three villages.

**Table 11: Cropping pattern in the Malabar villages, 2014**

Crops	Cropped area in Acres			
	Naduvil	Eruvessy	Alakode	Overall
1. Rubber	325.7 (53.6)	195.0 (39.9)	173.5 (48.0)	694.2 (47.6)
2. Coconut	215.8 (35.5)	145.7 (29.8)	145.6 (40.3)	507.1 (34.8)
3. Arecanut	38.5 (6.3)	112.5 (23.0)	13.0 (3.6)	164.0 (11.2)
4. Banana	13.5 (2.2)	16.4 (3.4)	15.7 (4.3)	45.6 (3.1)
5. Cashew	14.7 (2.4)	19.4 (4.0)	13.7 (3.8)	47.8 (3.3)
Total	608.2 (100.0)	489.0 (100.0)	361.5 (100.0)	1458.7 (100.0)

*Note:* Figures in parentheses indicate the respective percentages.

*Source:* Sample survey data.

At the same time, it is to be noted here that Kerala has a peculiar land use system by which a vast majority of the farm households have evolved a mixed cropping system in view of the shrinkage in farm lands due to sub-division and fragmentation of holdings over time. As a result, the relative share of area grown with crops, particularly, coconut, arecanut, banana and cashew is to be reckoned as mixed crop areas, which is also reflected in the data presented in Table 9 and Table 10. However, rubber is an exception in this case, as an overwhelming majority of rubber growing areas in Kerala remain to be monoculture plantations due to the specific rubber development policies followed by the Rubber Board over time (Viswanathan and Bhowmik, 2014).

An important point emerges from the above discussion on the emergence of rubber as the predominant landuse all over Kerala including the study villages, is ‘what were the factors that could have resulted in such a paradigm shift?’. In fact, this issue has been addressed by several studies over time<sup>13</sup>, which identified a host of socio-economic, political, legal (land reforms related), institutional (especially, Rubber Board), market (especially, prices) and labour related factors that have contributed towards the dramatic agrarian transformation, characterised by shift in cropping pattern from food crops to commercial crops, especially, rubber.

The scenario in the study villages is also not different as majority of the farmers consider that the returns from rubber cultivation have been considerably higher than that from coconut and arecanut or any other seasonal and perennial crops for that matter. This is further evident from Table 12. For instance, on an average, a farmer growing rubber was earning a gross income of Rs. 68481 per acre compared to Rs. 29221 per acre in case of coconut and Rs. 19232 per acre in case of arecanut. In Naduvil and Eruvessy, the average rubber income reported was still higher than the overall average gross income.

**Table 12: Gross income from rubber and other crops in the study villages**

Village	Gross income (Rs./acre)			Income as (%) of rubber income		Share of rubber in total household income (%)
	Rubber	Coconut	Arecanut	Coconut	Arecanut	
Naduvil	78659	29737	18457	37.8	23.5	56.8
Eruvessy	76935	39773	31711	51.7	41.2	53.1
Alakode	57026	18445	12467	32.3	21.9	48.3
Overall	68481	29221	19232	42.7	28.1	52.5

*Source:* Sample survey data.

<sup>13</sup> See Viswanathan, 2014 for a detailed review of these studies and a critical analysis of the agrarian transformation taken place in Kerala over the past 5-6 decades.

This in other words suggests that coconut income was less than half of the income earned from rubber per acre and it was hardly one third of rubber income in case of arecanut. The income earned from rubber also constituted more than half of the household income in case of Naduvil and Eruvessy, while it was almost half in case of Alakode. So, it may be concluded that the relative price advantage as well as income from rubber have been the crucial factors that had driven the expansion of rubber area in Kerala, though institutional support and interventions by the Rubber Board also were equally important, as reiterated by several studies (George *et al.*, 1988; Lekshmi and George 2003; Viswanathan, 2014).

#### **4. The Changing Agrarian Landscape: Impacts and Concerns**

The foregoing analysis clearly brings out the changing agrarian landscape in the migrant villages in particular, which is also reflective of the broader pattern of agrarian transformation occurred in Kerala over the past 5-6 decades. It also emerges that the growth in area under rubber has significantly influenced socio-economic changes in the migrant villages in terms of increased investments in development of human capital, rural infrastructure and household assets, to mention a few. Viewed from this angle, migration had turned as an effective instrument in improving the socio-economic conditions of the small and marginal farmers who had moved from Travancore to Malabar in search of more cultivable lands against all odds in life.

Having acknowledged this fact, it is also important to dwell upon some of the important challenges and concerns that emanate from the agrarian landuse changes in the Malabar region and the migrant villages in particular. As observed, the region has lost a major chunk of its food cropped area to commercial crops. While paddy land may not have been directly reclaimed for rubber cultivation per se, it has been observed that paddy lands were initially reclaimed for cultivation of coconut, arecanut, vegetables and banana and at a later stage, some of these lands were permanently converted for cultivating rubber, as also authenticated by the LRIS data. The loss of such food crop areas is a matter of serious concern as it might lead to food insecurity at the local/ regional levels.

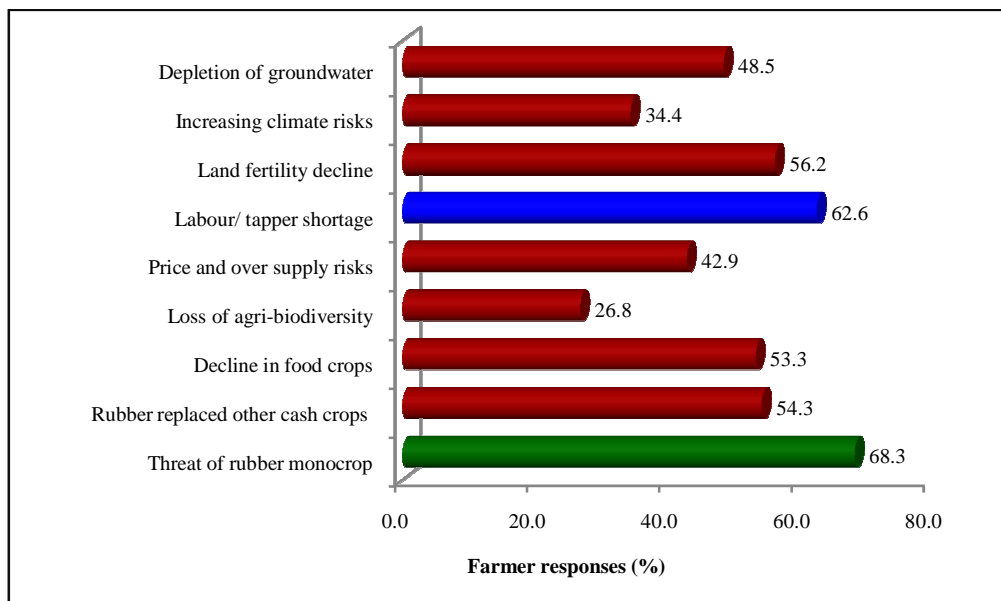
Even though it was observed that a significant share of farm lands are grown with mixed crops, it is yet unknown that 'whether these crops also include food crops of vital importance, so that it helps addressing the food insecurity at the local level. Moreover, the economic viability of such mixed cropping practices is often contested as the amount of produce realised from these areas do not generate adequate market surplus to the households. Further, a significant portion of the mixed cropped area is planted with either coconut or arecanut as the leading crops and these crops are well known in almost all

parts of Kerala for plant diseases, such as *Mandari* in the case of the former and fruit rot disease, called *Mahali* in case of the latter. These crops also face problems of wider fluctuations in prices and high labour costs for harvesting. Given this, farmers have always been hard pressed by the lack of alternative crops that are profitable, less labour demanding as well as free from plant/ crop diseases. Incidentally, since rubber had enjoyed all these features, there was a natural shift towards it, resulting in a massive expansion of the crop all over the state, including the study villages as already observed.

However, the scenario changed in the recent past with rubber itself facing serious problems of tapping labour shortage on the one hand and a persistent decline in prices on the other. These two issues are the latest challenges surfacing the rubber sector, adversely affecting the economic status of the farmers, as wages in general and tapping wages in particular have risen significantly, while rubber prices were declining. In such circumstances, the farmers face severe livelihood crisis, as they have already allocated major part of their farm lands for growing rubber and are left with no other farming alternatives.

The monoculture rubber also resulted in loss of agri-biodiversity in the study villages as revealed by the interactions with the farmers (Figure 7). Earlier, they were growing a variety of crops, such as pepper, coffee, ginger, etc in their areas, which were virtually replaced with rubber, while complying with the conditions set by the Rubber Board for issuing planting subsidy and other support measures. As farmers had settled in areas adjacent to forest areas, it also had resulted in destruction of forests as well as encroachment into forest areas.

**Figure 7: Farmer Responses about the major challenges and concerns**



*Source:* Sample survey data.

Thus, migration caused wide spread conversion of thick natural forests into agricultural fields, which necessarily changed the climatic situation in the region. Subsequently, the widespread cultivation of rubber in the humid areas caused drying up of the water bodies or depletion of the water sources, as reported by the farmers (Figure 7).

## **5. Conclusions and policy imperatives**

This paper examines the case of farmer migration from erstwhile Travancore region to the Malabar region during the 1940s through the 1980s and the resultant impact on the socio-economic status of the migrants on the one hand and the implications on the agrarian landscape of the region. As evident, the paper brings out the emergence of rubber as the dominant land use, which already has impacted in terms of shrinkage of farm lands grown with other food as well as cash crops in the migrant villages. Though expansion of rubber per se, may not have caused a decline of other commercial or food crops in the region, the several advantages that rubber enjoyed, had invariably influenced a majority of small and marginal farmers to grow rubber and thereby rationalize their farming choices.

It appears that the institutional as well as policy interventions followed by the Rubber Board and other crop promotional agencies, including the State Agriculture Department have been mutually exclusive and hence, a major segment of the farmers in the state have always been attracted by the farmer friendly institutional support systems provided by the

Rubber Board, which in fact, turned out to be pervasive in terms of promoting rubber monoculture. However, from a long-term perspective, this model of agricultural development may have serious implications on the socio-economic conditions of the farmers due to the increasing risks of growing such monocrop, which is highly integrated with the global market and hence the market and price risks. More importantly, the fact that rubber has already changed the agrarian landscape of the region will have serious consequences on the diverse agro-ecologies and hydrological conditions of the region as revealed by the study. Given the fact that the farmers in the Malabar region continue to grow a mix of several other crops, there is a strong case for revamping the agriculture sector in the region in terms of strengthening the food crop production systems, on the one hand, and making the commercial crop production systems more competitive and resilient in the context of emerging market uncertainties and climate change induced risks, on the other.

From a sustainable agriculture development perspective, the paper calls for effective collaborations and co-ordination between various crop- promotional agencies in Kerala, such as the Rubber Board, Spices Board, Coconut Development Board, Kerala Horticulture Development Board, Coffee Board, the State Agriculture Department, etc to come together and devise a long-term agricultural development policies and strategies for the state in general and the Malabar region in particular. There should be strict vigilance on the land use and farm management practices adopted by farmers, with proper checks on the extensive promotion of commercial crops that adversely affect the agro-biodiversity and hydrological and ecosystem balance of the regions. In the emerging context, it becomes more important that agriculture development needs to be seen from an integrated system perspective, which calls for efficient co-operation/ co-ordination between the various agencies in matters of respecting the agro-ecosystem integrity of the state and devising action plans for promoting integrated farming systems, instead of the mutually exclusive promotional schemes as exist today.

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