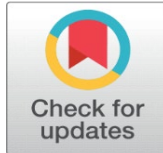
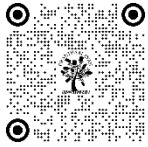


# SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND CHRISTIAN MIGRATION TO NORTH KERALA DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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DOI  
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3153](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3153)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

The first half of the 20th century witnessed a significant migration of Christian communities to North Kerala, driven by a confluence of socio-economic factors. This study explores the interplay between agrarian reforms, economic opportunities, and social structures that facilitated this migration. The availability of fertile agricultural lands in Malabar and favorable tenancy reforms offered economic stability to Christian settlers, predominantly from central Kerala. Additionally, the spread of missionary education and healthcare played a pivotal role in equipping these communities with skills and resources to adapt to their new environment. Socio-religious networks further facilitated migration by ensuring social support and communal cohesion in the resettlement process. This migration also marked a shift in the demographic and cultural landscape of North Kerala, fostering economic development while contributing to the region's pluralistic ethos. By analyzing archival records, oral histories, and socio-economic data, this paper seeks to highlight the intricate dynamics that shaped this historical movement and its long-term implications.

**Keywords:** Christian Migration, North Kerala, Socio-Economic Factors, Travancore, Land Acquisition, Agrarian Economy, Missionary Efforts, Caste Oppression, Rubber Cultivation, Early 20th Century

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration, as a phenomenon, has played a pivotal role in shaping the demographic, economic, and cultural landscapes of regions across the globe. One such significant historical migration was the movement of Christian communities to North Kerala in the first half of the 20th century. This migration, predominantly from the Travancore region, was not merely a demographic shift but a socio-economic transformation that redefined the region's agrarian and cultural identity. Understanding the factors that prompted this migration offers valuable insights into the interplay between social structures, economic opportunities, and religious motivations during that era.

The Travancore region during the first half of the 20th century was characterized by high population density, limited cultivable land, and deeply entrenched caste hierarchies. For the Christian communities, who were primarily engaged in agriculture, these challenges were compounded by a lack of upward socio-economic mobility. Despite their historical conversion to Christianity, which offered a degree of social upliftment, these communities continued to face structural barriers.

Many were small-scale farmers or tenant cultivators who struggled to sustain themselves in the face of land scarcity and high taxes. These conditions acted as significant push factors, compelling individuals and families to seek better prospects elsewhere.

In contrast, the Malabar region, particularly North Kerala, offered the promise of untapped agricultural potential. With vast tracts of uncultivated land available for settlement and cultivation, Malabar presented itself as a land of opportunities. The British colonial administration, keen on developing the region's agrarian economy, facilitated land grants and leases, making it easier for settlers to acquire agricultural land. This availability of fertile land for cash crops like pepper, coconut, and later rubber became a major pull factor for Christian farmers from Travancore.

Religious institutions also played a crucial role in this migration. Missionary organizations, both Protestant and Catholic, not only encouraged migration but also provided essential support systems for settlers. Churches and mission schools established in North Kerala created a sense of community and belonging, reducing the cultural and social isolation that migrants often faced. These institutions also facilitated access to education and healthcare, further improving the quality of life for the settlers.

This migration, however, was not without its challenges. The settlers had to adapt to a new social and cultural environment, often facing resistance from the local population. Despite these hurdles, the Christian migrants managed to integrate themselves into the local economy and society over time, contributing significantly to the region's agricultural and economic development.

This study seeks to delve deeper into the socio-economic and cultural factors that drove Christian migration to North Kerala during the first half of the 20th century. By examining historical records, oral histories, and archival data, it aims to shed light on the motivations, experiences, and impacts of this migration. Furthermore, the study explores how this migration influenced the socio-cultural and economic fabric of North Kerala, transforming it into a vibrant region with a unique blend of traditions and practices.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Robin Jeffrey (1976) in his seminal work examined the socio-economic factors that influenced Christian migration to North Kerala during the early 20th century. He highlighted the impact of colonial agrarian policies that opened up opportunities for settlement and labor, particularly in plantation economies. Jeffrey argued that the migration was driven by the pursuit of economic stability, better land ownership prospects, and the role of missionary interventions in providing education and employment. His analysis emphasized how these migrations shaped the socio-economic fabric of North Kerala, particularly in fostering community cohesion and upward mobility.

Susan Bayly (1989) provided an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic factors influencing Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century. She argued that the migration was driven by the interplay of caste dynamics, economic opportunities, and missionary efforts. Bayly emphasized that landownership, agricultural expansion, and access to education played pivotal roles in this movement. Her work also highlighted how these migrations contributed to the restructuring of social hierarchies and the economic integration of Christian communities in North Kerala.

K. T. Paul (1930) explored the socio-economic underpinnings of Christian migration to North Kerala, focusing on the role of missionary activities in creating opportunities for education and employment. He argued that these factors, coupled with economic hardships in their native regions, prompted many Christians to migrate in search of better prospects. Paul also emphasized how these migrations contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of the community and their integration into the agrarian economy of North Kerala.

Richard F. Young (1971) examined the economic motivations behind Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century. He highlighted that the availability of arable land and opportunities in agricultural development were significant pull factors. Young also noted that migration was facilitated by the supportive network established by missionaries, who provided resources and guidance to the migrating communities. His study underscored the long-term impact of these migrations on the economic stability and social cohesion of Christian settlers in the region.

Sarah F. Rose (1915) provided an early account of Christian migration to North Kerala, emphasizing the search for economic stability as a primary factor. She highlighted how access to fertile land and the promise of better livelihoods attracted Christian families to the region. Rose also discussed the role of missionary institutions in facilitating these movements by offering support in the form of education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Her work remains a foundational reference for understanding the socio-economic dimensions of Christian migration during this period.

P. T. Thomas (1925) explored the socio-economic causes of Christian migration to North Kerala, focusing on the role of agrarian reforms and the availability of cultivable land. He argued that economic deprivation in the migrants' native regions, combined with the prospects of land ownership and improved livelihoods in North Kerala, acted as strong pull factors. Thomas also emphasized the influence of missionary networks in organizing and supporting these migrations, which significantly contributed to the socio-economic advancement of Christian communities in the area.

M. C. Chacko (1938) analyzed the socio-economic motivations behind Christian migration to North Kerala, emphasizing the interplay between economic opportunities and community support systems. He highlighted that the migrants were drawn to the region due to the availability of fertile agricultural land and better employment prospects. Chacko also pointed out the critical role of Christian missions in facilitating the migration process by providing essential resources, including education, training, and financial assistance, which helped the settlers establish themselves in their new environment.

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. It provides a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and cultural forces behind Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century. This is crucial for comprehending historical migration trends and their impact on regional development.
2. The research highlights how migration influenced the socio-economic fabric of North Kerala, particularly in relation to land ownership, employment, and educational opportunities. It helps in understanding the long-term transformations in both the migrant communities and the local population.
3. The study sheds light on the pivotal role played by missionaries in shaping migration dynamics, particularly through the provision of resources such as education, healthcare, and financial support. This emphasizes the intersection of religion and socio-economic development in colonial contexts.
4. By analyzing the impact of colonial policies and agrarian reforms on migration, this study can inform contemporary discussions on the role of state policies in shaping migration and settlement patterns.
5. The research adds to the body of literature on South Indian migration, offering a case study on the Christian communities of Kerala. It contributes to the broader field of migration studies by focusing on the specific socio-economic factors that influenced religious and community movements during a significant historical period.

#### Objectives

- To analyze the socio-economic factors that influenced Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century.
- To examine the role of missionary activities in facilitating migration and providing resources like education and employment opportunities.
- To investigate the impact of agrarian policies and land reforms on the migration patterns of Christian communities.
- To explore the cultural and community dynamics that supported the settlement and integration of Christian migrants in North Kerala.
- To assess the long-term socio-economic implications of Christian migration on the region's development and community structures.

#### Research Gap

While there is existing literature on migration patterns in India, particularly in relation to socio-economic factors and colonial influences, there are several gaps in the current research on Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century. Most studies on migration in Kerala tend to focus on broader trends such as rural-to-urban migration or labor migration, with limited attention to the specific migration patterns of Christian communities. Additionally, while colonial agrarian reforms have been addressed in various studies, there is a lack of focused research on how these reforms specifically influenced the migration of Christian communities to North Kerala. The role of missionary networks, which played a significant part in facilitating migration by providing education, employment, and social support, also remains underexplored. Moreover, while migration studies have looked at immediate causes, there is a gap in examining the long-term socio-economic impacts of migration on both the migrants and local communities in North Kerala. Finally, the cultural integration of Christian migrants into local society, and how they maintained their identity while adapting

to new socio-economic realities, is another area that has not been adequately explored. Addressing these gaps will offer a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of Christian migration to North Kerala, enriching the broader discourse on migration in colonial and post-colonial India.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-economic factors behind Christian migration to North Kerala in the early 20th century. The following methods will be utilized to collect and analyze data:

- **Historical Document Analysis:** The study will begin with a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources such as archival materials, missionary records, government reports, and newspapers from the early 20th century. These documents will provide insights into the policies, social conditions, and migration trends during the period under study.
- **Case Study Method:** To provide a detailed understanding of Christian migration, case studies of specific migrant communities in North Kerala will be conducted. These case studies will involve examining historical migration patterns, settlement processes, and socio-economic outcomes for the migrants. Information will be drawn from historical records and oral histories.
- **Interviews:** Oral history interviews will be conducted with descendants of early Christian migrants, community leaders, and local historians to gain personal perspectives on the migration experience. This qualitative data will supplement archival research by providing insight into the cultural and social factors that influenced migration, as well as the long-term impact on the community.
- **Content Analysis:** The study will analyze published works, including books and academic articles, to identify trends, themes, and gaps in existing research on Christian migration in Kerala. This will provide context for the study and help position the findings within the broader academic discourse on migration studies.
- **Comparative Analysis:** A comparative approach will be used to contrast migration patterns in North Kerala with those in other regions of South India during the same period. This comparison will help highlight specific factors that influenced migration to North Kerala, such as land availability, missionary support, and colonial policies.

### Results: Socio-Economic Factors behind Christian Migration

#### Economic Factors

- **Decline in Agricultural Economy:** In southern Kerala, traditional agricultural systems began to decline due to poor land management, over density on agricultural lands and socio-economic constraints, prompting families to seek better economic opportunities. In contrast north Kerala offered better prospects for extending cultivation. They cultivated a mix of food and cash crops such as paddy, tapioca, coconut, areca nut, pepper etc. They also cultivated rubber, coffee and tea. In north Kerala the land and climate was very suitable for these types of crops.
- **The First World War and the consequent hardships** also was a main motive force for the Christian migration to north Kerala. The First World War caused immense miseries all over the world. It resulted in inflation, shortage of food and other essential items due to disrupted global trade. Traditional handicraft industries were declined leading to large scale unemployment and several economic hardships. This situation was also a motivating force for Christian migration to Malabar from Central and South Kerala.

Factor	Southern Kerala (1920-1950)	Northern Kerala (1920-1950)
<b>Agricultural Economy</b>	Declining land fertility, less land availability	More fertile lands and land available for settlement
First World War	Shortage of food and unemployment	Better employment prospects due to availability fresh lands

### Social and Religious Factors

- **Religious Conflict:** In some areas of southern Kerala, religious tensions (including caste-based discrimination) may have pushed Christian families to move to more tolerant or economically stable regions in the north.
- **Role of Missionaries:** Christian missionaries played a significant role in supporting migration by establishing schools, hospitals, and other institutions in North Kerala, which provided essential services to Christian families migrated to North Kerala. Missionaries also helped migrants to buy land for settlement and cultivation by negotiating landlords and government authorities. They played vital role to solve all conflicts with local people. In addition to all these they also provided social support including counselling and welfare services to the new migrants which helped them to adapt new environment.

Factor	Southern Kerala	Northern Kerala
<b>Religious Tension</b>	Higher levels of caste-based conflicts	More religious harmony and tolerance
<b>Missionary Influence</b>	Missionary activity focused on education	Missionary support for migration, establishment of schools and hospitals

### Political and Stability Factors

- **Political Instability:** Southern Kerala experienced social and political unrest during the first half of the 20th century, particularly with the rise of independence movements. The Travancore rebellion against British colonial authorities and the Punnappra Vayalar uprising against the Travancore government to mention a few resulted in significant violence and instability. These factors made migration to more stable regions like North Kerala appealing.
- **Land Reforms and Policy:** The government implemented various land reforms in North Kerala; the chief among them was the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 which aimed to regulate relationship between landlords and tenants in this region. It provided security of tenure to cultivators ,prohibited landlords to evict tenants and introduced the concept of “ fair rent”. All these attracted Christians from other regions to North Kerala.

Factor	Southern Kerala	Northern Kerala
<b>Political Stability</b>	High levels of social unrest and political upheaval	Relatively stable governance in northern regions
<b>Land Reforms</b>	Limited opportunities for land ownership	Government initiatives to provide land to settlers
<b>Influence of Land Policies</b>	Decreasing land availability	Land reforms encouraging migration for agricultural settlement

## 4. DISCUSSION

The migration of Christians from southern to northern Kerala during the first half of the 20th century is a complex phenomenon driven by a combination of socio-economic, political, and religious factors. This study examined several of



these influences, including economic hardship, religious conflicts, land reforms and political instability, all of which played a significant role in shaping the migration patterns.

### **Economic Hardship and Industrial Growth**

The economic conditions in southern Kerala during the first half of the 20th century were marked by a decline in agricultural productivity, largely due to land fragmentation, reduced fertility, overcrowding on agricultural land and the consolidation of land into the hands of a few elites. This, coupled with rising poverty levels in rural areas due to first world war created a push factor for many Christian families to seek better opportunities in the more economically stable regions of northern Kerala.

### **Religious and Social Factors**

Religious and social tensions were another key driver of migration. Southern Kerala, especially in areas like Travancore, witnessed frequent social and religious unrest, including caste-based discrimination and clashes between different religious groups. For many Christians in the south, the migration to the relatively more peaceful and tolerant regions of north Kerala offered a sense of religious freedom and security. This phenomenon can be seen as a form of social mobility, where people sought to escape the rigid social structures and discrimination they faced in their original places of residence.

### **Political Instability and Land Reforms**

The political landscape of southern Kerala during the early 20th century was marked by social unrest, uprisings, and movements for independence. The resultant instability created a climate of uncertainty, prompting families to move to the more stable political environment in northern Kerala. Moreover, the introduction of land reforms in northern Kerala, which aimed to provide land to settlers, acted as an additional pull factor. These reforms provided new settlers with opportunities for land ownership, further motivating Christians from the south to relocate.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the migration of Christians to northern Kerala in the early 20th century was driven by a multifaceted set of socio-economic and political factors. Economic hardships in southern Kerala, religious tensions, and the promise of better opportunities in northern Kerala—through stability, land availability and land reforms—created a powerful pull factor for migrating families. The role of Christian missionaries in providing both religious and educational infrastructure further amplified the movement. By analyzing all these push and pull factors of this historic Christian migration in Kerala we get a clear picture of Christian population in North Kerala. Future studies could delve deeper into specific case studies or examine the long-term effects of this migration on the socio-economic development of the region.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

None

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