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# Exploring Socio-Economic Changes: Demographic Transitions of Syrian Christians in Kerala with special reference to Nordic Model

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**Abstract:** *The present study investigates socio-economic changes and demographic transitions of Syrian Christian community in Kerala with a special focus on Nordic Model, which is practised in Scandinavian nations. The theoretical framework draws from the Nordic Model, renowned for its emphasis on social welfare and economic prosperity to analyze its applicability and relevance to the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. This conceptual study delves into the socio-economic transformations occurring within the Syrian Christian community in Kerala with a focal point on demographic shifts, while drawing insights from the Nordic Model. Leveraging secondary databases and existing literature, the research endeavors to discern the intricate relationship between socio-economic variables and demographic trends among Syrian Christians. The conceptual framework integrates theoretical perspectives from sociology, economics, and demography to analyze how socio-economic factors intersect with religious and cultural norms, influencing demographic behaviors among Syrian Christians. Furthermore, this study endeavors to offer theoretical insights and methodological considerations for future empirical research on the topic. This study critically examining existing data and synthesizing relevant literature contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between socio-economic changes, religious identity, and demographic transitions among Syrian Christians in Kerala.*

**Keywords:** *Syrian Christian, Socio-economic changes, Demographic transitions, Nordic model, Migration, Scandinavian countries*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This research explores the demographic transitions of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala, framing them within the broader context of socio-economic changes. The influence of the Nordic model characterized by its emphasis on social welfare, economic equality, and labor market policies is used as a reference point to understand these changes. The introduction delineates the scope of the research by defining key concepts, outlining the relevance of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala's demographic makeup, and detailing the significance of the Nordic model as a comparative framework.

According to Arun Babu Zachariah (2020) 'Syrian Christians of India, St Thomas Christians, Nasrani or Malabar Nasrani or Malankara Nasrani or Nasrani Mappila, are an ethno religious community of Indian Christians from the state of Kerala who employ the East Syriac and West Syriac Liturgical Rites of Syriac Christianity. They are now divided into several different Eastern Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Protestant (CSI, Marthoma, Evangelical) and independent bodies, each with their own liturgy and traditions. Syrian Christians are those Christians who came from West Asia in different centuries of the first millennia or converted to Christianity from Judaism or emerged out of intermarriages between Christians who migrated from West Asia ( including Jews who settled in BC ) and those who converted to Christianity from influential indigenous communities in Kerala as a result of the efforts of St. Thomas according to St Thomas tradition who landed in Cranganore in the first century AD or due to the efforts of Christian prelates from West Asia between the period of the first century AD and arrival of the Europeans.

The historical existence of Christian, Muslim, and Judaic communities in precolonial Kerala is intricately linked to the historical networks of Indian Ocean trade. The field of historiography and its corresponding sources are unequivocal in this regard. In his recent analysis of a popular myth concerning the introduction of Islam and Christianity ) in Kerala, Sebastian R. Prange has astutely observed that the narrative framework therein "is not a fabrication but rather aligns with historians' understanding of the commercial dynamics of maritime Asia. Kerala has been historically renowned for its ability to attract Christian, Muslim, and Jewish settlers for over a thousand years. Fabled accounts, originating in the sixteenth century or potentially even earlier, trace the arrival of Christians and Jews to the first century (52 CE and 67 CE, respectively), and the Muslims to the time of the Prophet during the early seventh century.

The most ancient existing document found within Kerala, validating the existence of these communities, is the Tarisapalli Copperplate Grant, which was officially issued in 849, marking the fifth year of reign of the Cēra king, Sthanu Ravi. The Kollam Copper plates, Quilon Copper plates, and Syrian Christian Copper plates, also known as Tabula Quilonensis, were issued from Kollam, a city in Kerala. These plates were issued twenty-five years after the start of a new era that became widely used in Kerala in the subsequent centuries. This era was actually named after the city of Kollam itself. In the plates in question, the city is referred to as Kurakkēnikkollam. There is no mention of the city in any contemporary sources prior to the Tarisāppalli grant. (*The Tarisāppalli Copperplate Grant and the Early Christians of India (Draft Paper, Not to Be Cited)* Keywords : Tarisāppalli, St. Thomas Christians, Kollam, Maruvān Sapīr Īṣō, Cēras, Maritime Trade, Agrarian Economy, n.d.).

While MGS Narayanan(1972) in Cultural Symbiosis of Kerala ( Kerala Historical Society, (Trivandrum), p 32 ) mentions that a small group of West Asian Christians (from Syria ) led by trader Marwan Sapir Iso and Bishops Mar Sabore and Mar Aphroth migrated to Kollam in 823 AD , V Nagam Aiya, (1901) in The Travancore State Manual (, Vol. 1, p.344 ) mentions the year as 822AD.

Kesavan Veluthatt and MR Raghava Warriar (2013) in their book Tharisapalli Pattayam ( National Book Stall) explains in detail on the Tharisapally Chepped granted in 849 AD by Aiyyan Atikal Thiruvadikal the ruler of Venad who was a feudatory of Cheraman Perumal the Chera emperor.

The Syrian Christians of Kerala, Devika & Varghese (2011) can trace their origins back to the initial century AD, to the narrative of the proselytism of the Apostle St Thomas in India, which is firmly embedded in faith. The Syrian Christians are distinguished from the Latin Christians, who were purportedly converted by the Portuguese, and identified themselves as 'Nazranis' or 'St Thomas Christians', until the arrival of the Dutch, as they adhered to the Syrian liturgy due to their ecclesiastical communion with the East Syrian Patriarchate. The hub of the Syrian Christians is located in South and Central Kerala; their relocation to Malabar is relatively recent. Prior to colonization, they held a prominent position in commercial activities, military service, and agriculture, and it is said that they enjoyed a high-caste status akin to the Nairs. Moreover, they were closely integrated into the traditional Brahmin-centric caste system, but without sacrificing their distinct identity as Nazranis.

In the realm of discourse, the notion of the Nordic model (Koivunen et al., 2021) is in circulation and holds political significance on a global scale, as well as within the Nordic countries themselves. Within this context, it serves as a symbol and instrument to pursue diverse political objectives, while also functioning as a means of cross-national comparison, specifically to analyze the policies of neighbouring nations. Moreover, it serves as a shared asset for both regional and national self-promotion. This model is a dynamic and productive concept, influenced by historical events and collective imaginings, and is utilized to foster the development of policies. The online article 'Luther and the roots of Nordic welfare' states that ( <https://www.mutualinterest.coop/2021/01/luther-and-the-roots-of-nordic-welfare-states>) Martin Luther's interpretation of Romans 1:17 ("The righteous will live by faith") had a profound impact on European history. While it sparked the Reformation, its influence extends even further, shaping the modern political landscape of Nordic welfare model. As Robert H. Nelson argues in his book, "Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy," the tenets of social democracy can be seen as a secularized version of Lutheran beliefs.

Karen M. Anderson (2009) writes that traditionally, explanations for the development of Scandinavian welfare states haven't focused much on religion. However, Scandinavia's unique political and religious landscape played a key role. Proportional representation, along with Scandinavia's social makeup, led to a political system with many parties representing various socio-economic groups, like farmers (agrarian parties). Religious parties, on the other hand, were unimportant or nonexistent. The foundation for this distinct relationship between church and state goes back to the 16th century Reformation. Kings in Denmark and Sweden seized power from the church, taking control of its wealth and influence. They then incorporated the clergy into the government and assumed the social welfare responsibilities previously handled by the church, such as providing hospitals and helping the poor.

The Nordic Model is well-known for its comprehensive welfare system and robust social security. Kerala's Syrian Christians, like other Keralites, have historically benefitted from the state's relatively progressive health and education policies, often compared to the Nordic model of development. Research could focus on how the welfare policies have impacted the Syrian Christian population, particularly regarding health outcomes and access to education.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The genesis of Syrian Christianity in Kerala (Varghese Meloottu, 2023) is found in the oral tradition of the arrival of Saint Thomas, a disciple of Jesus Christ. While the historical verification of Thomas' arrival is uncertain, the Christian community in Kerala embraces this event as an integral part of their cultural heritage, upon which subsequent Christian movements have been established. Concurrently, there are reliable sources that substantiate the migration of Christians from the Middle East to Kerala since AD 345.



In the year 345 AD, a devout follower of the Christian faith named Thomas of Cana embarked on a journey sanctioned by the Catholicos of the East [ Visvanathan (1993) ]. Accompanied by a group of Christians, both secular and clerical, hailing from Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Nineveh, Thomas sought to offer solace and support to the Thomas Christians residing in Kerala, who were experiencing a lack of spiritual nourishment. The newly arrived Christians” (Varghese, 2019) upon their arrival, brought with them much-needed spiritual and ecclesiastical leadership to the pre-existing Thomas Christians. They, however, identified themselves as the Canaanites, or locally known as Southists or 'Thekumbhagar', and deliberately maintained a sense of separation from the pre-existing Thomas Christians, also known as the Northists or 'Vadakumbhagar'. These divisions, however, held little significance for the local Hindu population, who continued to regard both groups as Syrian Christians. Over time, the ecclesiastical language transitioned to Syriac, and the local clergy were ordained in accordance with the Syrian Church Tradition, marking the beginning of the ecclesiastical and liturgical practices of the Kerala Syrian Christian community. According to Pius Malekandathil (2010) Syrian Malabar Christian tradition, Mar Sabor and Mar Proth were two Chaldean Assyrian Bishops who landed in the port of Kollam (in present-day Kerala) with the help of a merchant Sabr Iso in 823 AD. The book titled “Cultural Symbiosis of Kerala” published by Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, page number 32 - mentions that the migration of Syrian Christians under Marwan Sapir Iso from West Asia was in 823 AD. Tharissapally Chepped was granted to Marwan Sapir Iso by Aiyyan Adikal Thiruvadikal, the ruler of Venad Kingdom In 849 AD (The Travancore Archeological Series, Volume 2, and Viswa Vijnana Kosam, Volume 6). Venad Kingdom was under the Chera empire which was ruled by Sthanu Ravi Varma during this period and the copper plates were given in his 5th regnal year. Throughout this particular timeframe, the term "Syrian" became localized within the local caste system and was less associated with the "residents of Syria". However, it still pertains to the utilization of the Syriac language in religious ceremonies. Significantly, "the term has evolved to signify a community resembling a caste, claiming Brahmin, Nair, or 'pure' Syrian lineage. Syrian Christian integration (Fuller, 1976) entailed the process of assimilation into the pre-existing social hierarchy and the local community, which was already organized based on caste. Conventionally, it has been acknowledged that the initial followers of Saint Thomas belonged to the esteemed Nambudiri caste. Despite the scarcity or absence of historical documentation supporting this claim, it is not appropriate to assume, as highlighted by C. J. Fuller, that these individuals were granted Nambudiri status by the Nambudiris themselves. There was a custom that some male member of the Syrian Christian community had to touch objects of veneration tainted by the lower caste Hindus, before they were, offered to the deity to be cleaned of all its impurity (Thomas, 2018) This practise prevalent till recent times defined the position of the Syrian Christians in the society. The Nordic Model is well-known for its comprehensive welfare system and robust social security. Kerala's Syrian Christians, like other Keralites, have historically benefitted from the state's relatively progressive health and education policies, often compared to the Nordic model of development. Research could focus on how the welfare policies have impacted the Syrian Christian population, particularly regarding access to education and health care. The Nordic nations are renowned for their comprehensive welfare services (Due et al., 1993; Esping-Andersen, 1990) a wage structure that is heavily compressed due to robust social partnerships, and the efficient regulation and governance in public administration. Although these attributes can be found in other political economies, it is their unique combination that allows the Nordic countries to achieve high levels of welfare, labor market participation, and regulatory effectiveness. Various typologies have been developed to capture the institutional features of different groups of nations across various policy domains, revealing the existence of a distinct Nordic variant of political economy. This variant encompasses consensus-based decision-making in public administration and on the labor market, as well as outcomes such as a high degree of international trade, exceptional economic performance, a well-functioning welfare state, and minimal wage inequality. The Nordic Model emphasizes economic equality and has mechanisms to redistribute wealth. Kerala's Syrian Christians, traditionally a land-owning and trade-oriented community, have experienced economic disparities. Research could explore the potential for policies informed by the Nordic Model to address economic inequality within the community. The Nordic model (de la Porte et al., 2023) has demonstrated its adaptability and resilience when confronted with both external and internal challenges. Consequently, it is pertinent to inquire whether countries characterized by alternative models can derive lessons from the Nordic model. The response is partially affirmative. The Nordic model relies on fundamental cultural and institutional elements that may not necessarily be present in other models, and the cultivation of these elements could require a considerable amount of time. These elements encompass a substantial level of trust among individuals and trust in institutions, particularly those responsible for providing welfare solutions. This culture of trust facilitates the development of solutions that are based on consensus-driven governance, enabling the formulation of regulations that cater to the needs of diverse stakeholders. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the Nordic countries are unitary states, the implementation of political solutions can be more easily accomplished, whereas certain aspects of the model may not be viable in federal states such as the United States (representing the liberal model) or Germany (representing the coordinated market economy model).

#### A. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To determine how the socio-economic status has evolved over recent decades and what factors have contributed to these changes in Syrian Christian Community in Kerala.
- 2) To understand what aspects of the Nordic Model could be beneficial or challenging when applied to the socio-economic context of Syrian Christians in Kerala.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The study purely depends on secondary data base, conducted thorough literature review to collect existing research, reports, and publications on the socio-economic status of Syrian Christians in Kerala. This includes academic journals, government reports, articles, and books. Identify and collate relevant secondary data sources such as census data, demographic surveys, economic reports, and publications by international organizations (e.g., UN, World Bank) pertinent to the socio-economic changes in Kerala. Systematically review literature on the Nordic Model to identify its core aspects such as social welfare systems, labor market policies, and gender equality measures. Compare the socio-economic structure and policies of Kerala with the Nordic countries using comparative tables and qualitative descriptions. Content analysis is the main tool used to analyse the entire data.

### IV. CONTEXT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN KERALA

#### A. Demography of Syrian Christian Population in Kerala

(Zachariah, 2001), At the onset of the new millennium, the approximate count of Syrian Christians in Kerala was assessed to be around 3 million, which constituted almost half of the entire Christian populace in the region. At the start of the previous century, specifically in the year 1901, their numerical strength stood at a mere 672 thousand. Hence, over the course of the 20th century, the Syrian Christian community witnessed a growth of 4.5-fold. This increment proved to be comparatively lesser when juxtaposed with the expansion of the overall population (5-fold) or that of the Christian community as a whole (6.6-fold). The Syrian Christians exhibited a growth rate surpassing that of individuals in other communities. However, by the year 1961, the Syrians lost their advantageous position, and the non-Christians emerged victorious. Throughout the remainder of the century, the non-Christians maintained higher rates of growth. In the concluding decade, the growth rate of the Syrian Christians amounted to a mere one-third of that observed among the non-Christians. An elucidation is warranted for this persistent disparity. Preceding 1961, the Syrian Christians exhibited a greater rate of demographic growth (a higher birth rate and lower mortality rate). Moreover, their population increased partially through conversions from alternative religious beliefs. Subsequent to 1951, the conversion aspect has largely dissipated (from a statistical standpoint). Due to the relatively elevated adoption rate of familial planning techniques among the Syrian Christians, their natural growth dwindled at a more accelerated pace. Another contributing factor is their heightened emigration rate.

#### B. Migration

Censuses do not yield direct data regarding the migration of communities. Nevertheless, indirect estimations reveal that Christians exhibit the highest net out-migration rate among the various communities residing in Kerala. Specifically, the average net migration from the state amounted to -2.8 individuals per 1000 population over the course of the ten-year period spanning from 1991 to 2001. It is worth noting, however, that the migration rate for Christians reached as high as -5.2 individuals per 1,000 population. Consequently, for Christians in the aforementioned time frame, in the light of a birth rate of 16.7 and a death rate of 6.1, the rate of natural increase would stand at 10.6 per 1000 population.

Alongside a net migration rate of -5.2, the growth rate for the decade would amount to 0.54. Migration has served as a significant means by which the Syrian Christian Community has adapted to the demographic pressures encountered subsequent to the 1940s. The rate of out-migration for this community exceeded that of all other communities within the region. Currently, Syrian Christians rank second only to Muslims in terms of emigration. In this regard, the Muslim community surpasses all others by a substantial margin. Nevertheless, extensive emigration is a relatively recent occurrence in the context of Kerala, whereas out-migration to other states in India has a much longer history. In this process, the Syrian Christians have accounted for the largest proportion. In earlier years, prior to the commencement of large-scale emigration to the Gulf countries, it is likely that even emigration rates could have been higher among the Syrians than among Muslims.

### C. Education

The Syrian Christians have gained significant recognition for their accomplishments in the realm of education. Consequently, it is reasonable to anticipate that they would fare favorably in terms of educational achievements when compared to other communities within the state. As per the 1931 census of Travancore, the literacy rate among Christian males in the age group of 10-14 stood at 82 percent, while for Christian females it was 74 percent. In contrast, the corresponding rates for Hindus were 77 percent and 59 percent respectively, while for Muslims it was 60 percent and 30 percent. Comparable disparities were observed among other groups as well. On the front of educational achievements, the Syrian Christians appear to occupy the highest position. Approximately 38.2 percent of them possessed a secondary school certificate or held higher degrees. The Nairs come closest in terms of achievement, with a proportion of 37.8 percent. Muslims, on the other hand, find themselves at the lower end of the spectrum, with only 12.8 percent.

### D. Employability

The Syrian Christian community does not rank highest in terms of employment within the state. While approximately two-thirds of Syrian Christian males are gainfully employed, the percentages are significantly higher for Latin Christians, Ezhavas, and Muslims. Only among Nairs is the employment rate for males lower than that of Syrian Christians. A substantial majority of Syrian Christians, around 45 percent, are self-employed, which is an unparalleled proportion compared to other communities. Furthermore, Syrian Christians surpass all other communities in terms of private sector employment. Roughly a quarter of the Syrian labor force consists of laborers in either agriculture or non-agriculture, which is the lowest percentage among the five communities. This pattern also holds true among women. Thus, the Syrian Christians, who were accustomed to holding a dominant position in the states of Travancore and Cochin, found themselves in a comparatively lower position numerically among the various communities of Kerala. The primary cause for this decline can be attributed to the state re-organisation that took place in 1956. However, two additional factors played a role in the relatively reduced proportion of Syrian Christians in Kerala. These factors include a higher rate of migration and a relatively higher decrease in fertility among this community. The precise measurement of the contribution of these factors is challenging due to the unavailability of relevant data. Since the state re-organisation in 1956, the decrease in the proportion of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala can be primarily attributed to a low birth rate and a significant rate of internal migration.

### E. Statistical Inferences in the Context of Study

#### 1) Religion-wise list of achievement news in 2011 and 2021 ( based on Malayala Manorama Newspaper in 2011 & 2021 - a prominent newspaper run by Syrian Christians )

The comparison of religious-wise achievement news in the Malayala Manorama newspaper for the years 2011 and 2021 reveals interesting trends. In 2011, Hindu achievements dominated across all categories, with 73.2% of PhDs, 91.3% of literature awards, 83.3% of sports awards, and 83% of education ranks. Christians and Muslims had significantly fewer achievements, with Christians representing 18.5% of PhDs, 4.3% of literature awards, 8.3% of sports awards, and 12.6% of education ranks, while Muslims accounted for 8.2% of PhDs, 4.3% of literature awards, 8.3% of sports awards, and 4.2% of education ranks. Fast forward to 2021, the trend remains largely similar, with Hindu achievements maintaining dominance, although slightly reduced in some categories. Christians and Muslims show a slight increase in their share of achievements across the board, suggesting a gradual improvement in recognition and representation. However, Hindu achievements still constitute the majority of the reported accomplishments, indicating a persistent disparity in media coverage and recognition among religious groups. Further analysis could explore the underlying factors contributing to these patterns, such as societal biases, access to opportunities, and representation in various fields. In 2011, Hindus accounted for the majority of reported PhD achievements (73.2%), followed by Christians (18.5%) and Muslims (8.2%). In 2021, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of reported PhD achievements for Hindus (72.2%), while Christians (19.8%) and Muslims (7.4%) saw slight increases. Hindus had the highest percentage of reported literature awards in both 2011 (91.3%) and 2021 (88.2%). Christians and Muslims had much lower percentages in both years, with Christians seeing a slight increase from 4.3% in 2011 to 8.8% in 2021, while Muslims experienced a decrease from 4.3% to 2.9%. Hindus again dominated the reported sports awards in both years, although there was a decrease from 83.3% in 2011 to 70% in 2021. Christians saw a slight increase from 8.3% to 10%, while Muslims experienced a notable increase from 8.3% to 20%. Hindus had the highest percentage of reported education ranks in both years (83% in 2011 and 78.6% in 2021). Christians and Muslims also saw increases in their reported education ranks from 2011 to 2021, with Christians rising from 12.6% to 13.1% and Muslims from 4.2% to 8.1%.

Overall, the data indicates that Hindus consistently had the highest percentage of achievement news across all categories in both 2011 and 2021. While there were slight fluctuations in percentages over the years, the dominance of Hindu achievement news remained pronounced. Christians and Muslims also saw some increases in their reported achievements, particularly in literature awards, sports awards, and education ranks, albeit from lower bases compared to Hindus.

2) *Religion-wise list of MPs in Kerala (2014 & 2019) ( from website and publications of concerned institutions)*

Religious-wise distribution of Members of Parliament (MPs) in Kerala for the years 2014 and 2019. In both years, Hindus constituted the majority of MPs, with 12 representatives each, accounting for 60% of the total MPs. Christians and Muslims maintained consistent representation with 5 MPs each, comprising 25% and 15% of the total MPs, respectively, in both 2014 and 2019. The data indicates a stable religious composition among Kerala's MPs over the five-year period, with Hindus consistently holding the majority share, followed by Christians and Muslims.

3) *Religion-wise list of MPs in Kerala (1971 - 2019) ( from website and publications of concerned institutions)*

Kerala across five different years: 1971, 1984, 2004, 2014, and 2019. In 1971, Hindus held the majority of seats, constituting 63.1% of the total, while Christians and Muslims represented 26.3% and 10.5%, respectively. By 1984, there was a shift with Christians gaining a larger share of seats at 35%, while Hindus and Muslims slightly decreased to 50% and 15%, respectively. In 2004, Hindus regained their majority share at 65%, while Christians dropped to 20%, and Muslims retained their 15% share. This trend persisted in 2014 and 2019, with Hindus consistently holding 60% of seats, Christians at 25%, and Muslims at 15%. Overall, the data illustrates a relatively stable pattern of religious representation in Kerala's parliamentary seats over the years, with Hindus consistently maintaining the majority, followed by Christians and Muslims. Despite some fluctuations, particularly in the 1980s, the general trend reflects a balanced distribution of parliamentary representation among the religious communities in Kerala.

4) *Religion-wise list of crime news in 2011 and 2021(based on Mathrubhoomi Newspaper in 2011 & 2021 - a prominent newspaper run by non Syrian Christians )*

Crime news reported by the Mathrubhoomi newspaper in 2012 and 2022, categorized by the religious affiliation of the individuals involved. In 2012, Hindus accounted for the majority of crime news, comprising 72% of the reported cases, followed by Muslims at 17.5% and Christians at 9.4%. Fast forward to 2022, Hindus still represents the largest proportion of crime news, though slightly reduced to 65.9%. The percentage of crime news involving Christians increased to 11.6%, while Muslims saw a more notable rise to 22.4%. These figures suggest a shift in the distribution of crime news across religious groups over the decade, with an increase in the proportion of cases involving Christians and Muslims. While Hindus continue to dominate the crime news, the rise in the percentage of cases involving Christians and Muslims may indicate either a change in reporting practices, shifts in crime patterns, or changes in societal dynamics. Further analysis would be needed to understand the underlying factors driving these trends and their implications for perceptions of crime and religious communities in Kerala.

5) *Religion-wise list of number of Various Department Employees ( from website and publications of concerned institutions)*

Religious affiliations of employees in various departments across Kerala, religious composition of employees in various departments or roles associated with government or university positions, presumably in Kerala, India, given the specific mention of Kerala universities and departments. Here is an interpretation of the percentages for each department or role: Kerala University 72% of the employees are Hindu, 13.2% are Christian, and 15% are Muslim. Kannur University 71% Hindu, 13% Christian, and 15% Muslim. Assistant Engineer Here, the distribution shifts slightly, with 63% Hindu, 23% Christian, and 14% Muslim. Deputy Secretary (Local Self Government) The distribution is 74% Hindu, 13% Christian, and 13% Muslim. Deputy Directors (Panchayath) this shows a balanced distribution between Hindus and Christians at 43% each, with Muslims at 14%. Panchayath Assistant dominantly Hindu at 86%, with equal representation of Christians and Muslims at 7% each. Village Assistants mainly Hindu at 76%, followed by Muslims at 18%, and Christians at 6%. Commissionerate of Village Development majority Hindu with 81%, followed by 5% Christian and 14% Muslim. LSG Planning Department 79% Hindu, 14% Christian, and 7% Muslim. District Panchayat Executive Officer this is the only role where one of the religions (in this case, Muslim) has 0% representation, with 86% Hindu and 14% Christian. District Suchithya Mission majority Hindu at 64%, then Muslim at 22%, and Christian at 14%. Haritha Kerala Coordinators similarly to some other departments, there's a high Hindu percentage at 86%, with Christians and Muslims both at 7%. Life Mission Coordinators shows a significant number of Christians at 36%, with Hindus at 57% and Muslims at 7%. Ardram Mission Coordinators the same distribution as the District Suchithya Mission with 64% Hindu, 22% Muslim, and 14% Christian.



Government Secretaries 64% Hindu, 24% Christian, and 12% Muslim. Ministers Private Secretaries displays a high Hindu majority at 76%, with Christians at 14% and Muslims at 10%.

*F. Number of government employees in Syrian Christian Churches in Trivandrum (1990 and 2020)*

Arun Babu Zachariah (2020) reveals that - Interviews with Church members, parish committee members, priests and review of Church publications, directory of Church members in 1990s and 2020 reveal that while in the 1990s there about 40% government employees in each of the Parishes attended by Syrian Christians in Trivandrum ( St George Orthodox Church, Palayam, CSI Christ Church, St Thomas Marthoma Church, Pattoor, St Mary's Malankara Catholic Church, Pattom, Lourde Syro Malabar Church Palayam, St Peter's Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Simhasana Cathedral, Indian Pentecostal Churches, Church of God, Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Church, Apostolic and New Generation Churches), among its members. But by the 2020s it fell considerably to less than five percent. This is significant because since 1900s when the trend of government employment began to emerge in the then state of Travancore most people from central Travancore migrated to Trivandrum in search of government jobs as a result of which the Syrian Christian Parishes in Trivandrum had the maximum number of government employees in the state. ( In contrast Syrian Christian interested in business migrated towards from central Travancore towards Ernakulam which was the financial centre and those interested in agriculture migrated to high ranges as land became scarce in the midlands of central Travancore as a result of increase in population and less habitable coastal areas and low lying lands adjoining paddy fields due to climate change )

## V. NORDIC MODEL

Marklund (2017), the author posits that, beginning in the 1950s, the nations of the Nordic region have actively cultivated a distinct 'brand' to facilitate their cultural diplomacy efforts. This strategic endeavor has capitalized on the global community's favorable reception of their economic and social strategies, as well as their adeptness at harmonizing the interests of capital and labor within a democratic and effective framework. In alternative terms, in addition to functioning as an account of tangible collaboration among actual nations, the notion of 'Nordic' is also a construct of discourse that is formulated and perpetuated to fulfil various objectives. Consequently, the geographically distinct array of systems that constitute the Nordic region establish a socio-spatial entity where the daily existence of inhabitants is concretely influenced by (Jalava, 2013) the policies and practices of the governments, as well as transnational ideology. To put it differently, the identity of Nordic is both practical and ideological. In the ensuing sections of this chapter, my attention will be directed towards the Nordic model for welfare, which serves as a cross-national Nordic attribute and holds significant value within the avant-garde of the Nordic nations. A thorough examination will be conducted to establish the conceptual interconnections between the Nordic welfare system as an ideology and the notion of career as a concept. The rationale behind this endeavor lies in the fact that, in addition to being a form of governance, the ideology of the welfare model represents a collection of beliefs, values, and opinions regarding the functioning of the state and its obligations towards society. In this regard, due to the widespread influence of this model, its ideological foundation also becomes an integral part of a communal culture, wherein culture can be defined as the amalgamation of thoughts and attitudes that distinguishes the members of a particular group or category from others (Hofstede, 1984).

*A. Context of Nordic Model for Welfare*

The Nordic model may be conceptualized as encompassing a cultural domain within a Bourdieusian comprehension of culture (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2010), one that functions as a terrain defined by a specific framework and a specific set of regulations: the doxa. The process of internalizing the doxa and the framework, as well as the conduct of the actor maneuvering within this domain, is comprehended through Bourdieu's analytical instruments as the formation of the habitus. In the ensuing segments, (Alestalo et al., 2009) will examine the investigation conducted on the Nordic welfare model to elucidate its nature, the manner in which the cultural domain is established, and the way in which the doxa operates to exert influence on the habitus, particularly in relation to individuals' perceptions of career. The diverse regional particularities of what is perceived as the Nordic paradigm for social security entail that the notion is regarded as "extensive, imprecise, and equivocal." Some might even argue that there is no universally acknowledged delineation of social security. The influence of politics (Kvist et al., 2012) on these enabling or constraining factors and how they are present in peoples' lives make them an issue of politics and ideology, for instance policies emphasising equal opportunities and equal access to education and welfare rights. Esping-Andersen's (1990) initial classification of welfare states can be identified as the 'liberal' welfare state, characterized by means-tested aid, modest universal transfers, and social insurance programs primarily aimed at supporting individuals with low incomes, those in the working class, and state dependents.



The United States, Canada, and Australia serve as archetypal illustrations of this category. The concept of entitlement in this context is linked with social stigma, and individuals who are less in need can avail themselves of privately-run yet subsidized welfare schemes based on market principles. This particular form of welfare system promotes a market-driven economy and contributes to the further stratification of social classes. The second cluster can be identified as the 'conservative, corporatist' welfare state. This particular cluster is observed in countries like Austria, France, Germany, and Italy. Historically, these countries have not prioritized market efficiency and commodification. The focus has not been on redistribution, as rights have traditionally been tied to one's social status and class, typically determined by income. These welfare systems have been greatly influenced by the church, leading to an emphasis on traditional family values in terms of welfare benefits. However, support for women's role as workers, through services like day care and family support, is limited. The state intervenes only when the family's ability to support its members is completely depleted. The third cluster is referred to as the 'social democratic' category (Alestalo et al., 2009), within which the Nordic countries are situated. Social democracy played a significant role in driving social reform, and in these nations, the concepts of universalism and decommodification of social rights were implemented to encompass all individuals within the welfare systems of the respective states. The social democrats opposed the notion of class distinctions and the dichotomy between the market and the state, instead emphasizing the pursuit of equality at the most superior level. The Nordic countries are regarded as progressive due to their efforts to diminish disparities in individuals' opportunities to secure employment, establish a family, and thrive in society. This is accomplished through the provision of tuition-free education, universally accessible healthcare, family benefits, and a comprehensive social security system that encompasses financial support for periods of unemployment, illness, and retirement (Alestalo et al., 2009; Antikainen, 2006).

#### *B. Similarities of Syrian Christian in Kerala Vs Nordic Model*

Comparing the Syrian Christians in Kerala to the Nordic model involves looking at two very distinct entities: a religious and ethnic community in India, and a social and economic framework employed by countries in the Northern European region. However, it's possible to explore certain aspects where similarities might be perceived, mainly through the lenses of social welfare, community cohesion, and historical cultural influences. Syrian Christians in Kerala known for their tight-knit community structure, Syrian Christians have historically placed a strong emphasis on mutual support and welfare within their community. Education and healthcare have been significant priorities, with many community-led initiatives in these sectors. Central to the Nordic model is a comprehensive welfare state, aiming to ensure that all citizens have access to education, healthcare, and social security. While the Nordic model applies these principles at a national level, Syrian Christians in Kerala exhibit a similar ethos within their community. Syrian Christians in Kerala, education has traditionally been highly valued, with a strong record of establishing and running educational institutions. This emphasis on education has led to high literacy rates and educational attainment within the community. Nordic Model, education is a cornerstone of the Nordic model as well, characterized by high-quality, publicly funded education systems. Both recognize education as a key to social mobility and a critical component of societal welfare. Syrian Christians in Kerala, this community has a long history of trade, especially in spices, with other parts of the world. This has made them historically more open to external influences and adaptable, characteristics that have helped them thrive. Nordic countries are known for their openness to international trade and globalization, balancing this with strong domestic welfare policies. This external openness paired with internal cohesion can be seen as a parallel to the Syrian Christian experience. Despite being a minority, Syrian Christians have maintained a strong sense of identity and community cohesion over centuries, contributing significantly to the broader Keralite society. Similarly, the Nordic countries place a strong emphasis on social cohesion and equality, underpinned by trust in public institutions and a high degree of social solidarity.

#### *C. Navigating Individualism: The Decline of Clergy Influence among Syrian Christians in Kerala*

Decreasing influence of clergy and Church on the life of Syrian Christians in Kerala which is very much related to the individualism, secularism and separation of religion and state in Nordic model in Scandinavian Nations. While in Scandinavian nations the majority of people belong to role of religion to influence the democratic system of government by resorting to vote bank appeasement politics based on religion or identity politics does not have much significance. But the situation in Kerala which has multiple religions and castes the is quite different from Scandinavian nations. Kerala's Syrian Christian Churches stand precariously at the crossroads of history. The decline in influence of the clergy attributed to controversial statements of Churchheads in many denominations and the open rebellion of laity online and offline have ignited speculation that the Church in Kerala is poised for yet another 'reformation'.

The decreasing influence of religion on personal life, seen among Syrian Christians in Kerala within the context of the Nordic Model, illustrates a nuanced transition in societal values and individual identities. For Syrian Christians, historically rooted in strong religious traditions, this shift might manifest in a gradual embrace of secular ethics and a broader, more inclusive approach to community and social engagement, mirroring the Nordic Model's emphasis on social welfare, equality, and human rights. This trend towards secularism encourages individuals from both contexts to evaluate and often redefine their ethical standings, societal roles, and personal beliefs outside the strictures of traditional religious doctrine. In Kerala, this evolution could foster an environment where dialogue and practices around education, healthcare, and social justice are increasingly informed by a secular, pluralistic worldview, akin to the societal norms in Nordic countries, thereby enabling a diverse yet cohesive community ethos. Such a transformation underscores the potential for cultural and religious traditions to adapt and thrive within a secular, inclusive framework, contributing to a dynamic, balanced synthesis of heritage and progressiveness in both regions.

The decreasing influence of clergy and church in the life of Syrian Christians in Kerala reflects a significant shift in the community's understanding of spirituality and religion. Historically, the Syrian Christian community in Kerala was deeply influenced by the teachings and authority of the clergy and the church, with religious leaders playing a central role in shaping their beliefs, practices and social norms. However, as the community has become more secularized, many individuals have begun to question the authority of the clergy and church and seek new ways to interpret and practice their faith. This trend towards a more personal and individualized spirituality has resulted in a decreased reliance on the clergy and church for guidance and support, allowing individuals to explore their faith with greater autonomy and creativity. While this shift has led to a decline in the influence of the clergy and church in the community's daily lives, it has also created space for new forms of spirituality and community engagement to emerge, fostering a more diverse and inclusive approach to religious expression like acceptance of house based Churches, ( as in Apostolic times ) cremation ( instead of burial ) and online worship (necessitated by Covid pandemic) .

The influence of churches in Scandinavian societies has significantly diminished over the past few decades, leading to a shift towards more secular and humanistic values. This trend can be observed in various aspects of Scandinavian societies, including changes in religious affiliation, decreased church attendance, and a growing disconnect between institutions and individuals. As a result, churches have lost some of their cultural and social relevance, leading to a decrease in their influence on personal lives, civic engagement, and social norms. While this shift has been met with some resistance from traditional religious groups, it has also created space for new forms of spirituality, community engagement, and social activism to emerge. As Scandinavian societies continue to evolve, it is likely that the influence of churches will continue to decrease, making room for new voices and perspectives to shape the cultural and social landscape.

In the egalitarian Nordic model, historical privileges are relinquished by the advantaged sections of society to create a more level playing field. This transition, often requiring concessions from powerful groups, can occur peacefully. The Syrian Christian community in Trivandrum exemplifies this. In the 1990s, church records show roughly 40% government employment among its members. But by the 2020s, this figure dropped below 5%, with minimal public outcry from the Syrian Christians of Trivandrum in particular and Kerala in general. The Syrian Christian community adapted by seeking better opportunities elsewhere and by resorting to migration, demonstrating peaceful acceptance of social change and the new social reality. Syrian Christians from Kerala are known for their successful integration into host countries. They achieve this by embracing the local culture, while still maintaining their own traditions. They avoid imposing their beliefs or appearing culturally superior.

#### *D. Syrian Christians Demographic Transitions in the reflection of Nordic welfare model*

Socio-economic transitions and how they correlate with or diverge from the principles and practices of the Nordic model reflect on the cultural, economic, and political viability of integrating aspects of the Nordic model into the social fabric of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Nordic model could be adapted to benefit the socio-economic conditions of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Based on the Nordic model policy makers propose recommendations for fostering inclusive growth and welfare within the community. The changing cultural values of the Syrian Christian community that relate to social welfare, communal solidarity, charity, social ethics and cultural tenets compare favorably with the underpinnings of the Nordic model. The trend of accepting the changing tide and giving up their privileges in the past since the time of Tharisapally Chepped granted by kings to the more recent giving up sizeable number of government jobs in Kerala and accepting the painful reality of leaving their land in search of livelihood have parallels to the socio-economic transitions based on the Nordic principles. The sizeable budget of Church run institutions and the considerable number of employees in Church run institutions that profess to provide the community better social security systems, accessibility to education, healthcare, income redistribution and social equality compare favorably with the Nordic welfare model, focusing on extensive government spending on social services and strong labor force participation.

Like the communities in Scandinavian nations, the Syrian Christian Churches and communities are generally peaceful. Since the community as a whole does not advocate violence against others, the actions of any individual Syrian Christian cannot be used to discredit the entire community. Following the model of Nordic societies, the Syrian Christian community would condemn any past wrongdoing and apologize for the harm caused.

## VI. FINDINGS

The Syrian Christian community in Kerala has witnessed significant economic growth, largely attributed to their higher educational achievements, enabling better job prospects locally and globally. Building upon this prosperity, implementing a robust welfare system similar to the Nordic model could bolster social security for the community's economically frail members. Moreover, the adoption of the Nordic model's universal healthcare could be advantageous in enhancing the community's health standards and alleviating medical expenses. The model's emphasis on equitable, high-caliber education could further advance the community's strong educational tradition. However, replicating the Nordic public services infrastructure poses fiscal challenges - due to the differences in the economic and tax systems - that exist between Kerala and Nordic countries. However, the collective approaches of the Nordic model to welfare which was in tune with the early Christian social norms that had similarities with the traditional Syrian Christian values may not agree with the recent recent rising phenomenon of individualism. Furthermore, to successfully integrate Nordic policies requires strong political determination and governance, which may prove too challenging within Kerala's unique socio-political landscape.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Syrian Christian community in Kerala has witnessed significant socio-economic changes over the past few decades, primarily driven by factors such as migration, education and employability. The study also explores the potential of the Nordic model as a framework for understanding the community's socio-economic changes and provides recommendations for policy makers to foster inclusive growth and welfare within the community. The findings suggest that incorporating elements of the Nordic model, such as social welfare systems, universal healthcare, and strong labor standards, could potentially benefit the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. However, cultural adaptability and political will are crucial for its successful implementation. This study looks forward to an important dimension which relates, socio-economic transitions and how they correlate with or diverge from the principles and practices of the Nordic model. This requires the viability of integrating cultural, economic, and political aspects of the Nordic model into the social fabric of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. The conceptual base of this study is built on primary data (qualitative data based on interviews), secondary data base, thorough literature review on existing researches, reports and publications on the socio-economic status of Syrian Christians in Kerala and Nordic model. This study purports to provide valuable insights into the socio-economic changes experienced by the Syrian Christian community in Kerala and the potential benefits and challenges of applying the Nordic model to this context. The findings demonstrate the importance of considering cultural adaptability and political will in implementing policies aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the community.

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