CHAPTER 10
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Studies on Arab Gulf migration from Malabar on an historical angle are nil, even though causes for this mass human exodus are well rooted in the socio-economic and cultural history of the region. Further, the windfall remittances, sent by the migrants back, have created a material affluence in the migrants concentrated areas termed as Gulf boom. This material affluence that started by 1970s has been clearly playing its role in reconfiguring the region’s socio-cultural structure. This second aspect was also not subjected to a serious study by any discipline. So, the present study is an attempt in this direction. The major questions that we tried to examine are the following. (1) The reasons for the dominance of Malabar over Travancore and Cochin in the various international migrations that the country witnessed and especially the Gulf migration. (2) The impact that the migration and the remittances have had on the socio-cultural transformation of the region.

Our enquiry into the reasons for the dominance of Malabar region in various international migrations revealed the intense socio-economic dissimilarities between Malabar on the one side and Travancore and Cochin on the other. The differences in the administrative nature of the Malabar from the other two are the basic reasons for these differences. While Travancore and Cochin, as princely states enjoyed royal benevolence, Malabar under the direct colonial rule lagged far behind in development and prosperity. The different land relations that existed in the three political units also contributed for this difference. While cultivating tenants and farm labourers constituted more than 86% of the agricultural population in Malabar, cultivating land owners constituted about 63% in Travancore. The commercialization of
agriculture under the alluring offers of the Travancore government paved the way for financial development of the state. This economic growth in turn resulted in the development of the secondary and tertiary sectors. Banking, transport, education and health sectors showed great improvement. And also it helped in raising the status of the downtrodden classes and birth of reformation organizations. Similar changes occurred in Cochin also.

The land tenure system stood in the way of such a change in Malabar. The commercialization of agriculture that developed in Malabar benefited only the high caste Hindus and superior tenants in Malabar. When Travancore and Cochin showed tremendous progress in all the three sectors, Malabar under the unfavourable policies of the colonial rule a gradual shift of the economy from primary to secondary or tertiary sector was clear by its absence.

After the formation of the new state, all the major and minor political parties of the state remained in power at least once in the state. The governments should have planned and implemented special packages for the development of Malabar. Unfortunately, no government took any serious interest towards this. The result was that the region remained in the wretched position as it was. In the percentage of literacy, number of schools and colleges, professional institutions, health facilities, means of transport, employment opportunities and banking facilities the six northern districts – Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargod – and its population of 80,13,117 (37.53 percent of the state total) remained below other southern districts and even state average.

In the history of international migration from the country, the share of Kerala was more or less nil till 1930s. The namesake presence was that of people from Malabar. Though the Census statistics regarding the share of Malabar in the indentured and Kangani migrations lists only a few persons,
other official documents speak vividly of Malabar’s presence. In the free migrations that followed the assisted migrations to Malaysia, Burma, Singapore and Srilanka, the migrants from Malabar outnumbered the combined strength of Travancore and Cochin.

In the present two ongoing international migrations, one interesting aspect has been noticed. In the professionals’ migration to the West, major share has been contributed by the southern districts. Where as the migrants to the Arab Gulf hailed chiefly from Malabar. This finding smashes the notion that migration to West Asia is the result of the Kerala Model Development and the consequent development of higher education from the state since the major migrants came from the educationally backward northern districts. About half of the migrants from Kerala have only an education of upper primary level. Malappuram that ranks first in the number of migrants has 63.59 percent migrants having upper primary level education. About 80.83 percent had no technical education. Another distinct feature of the Gulf migration is the religious make up of the migrants. Majority of the migrants hailed from Muslim community. The peculiar socio-economic conditions of the region coupled with the cultural, ethnic and religious connections of the community involved are main reasons behind the genesis of migration to the Gulf.

The external remittances work both positively and negatively on the family, society, environment and art and architecture of the region. In a place, where birth decided the social status of a person, the life style and consumption became the measuring scale of one’s social status. The state in general and Gulf pockets in particular, has started to show manifestations of new consumption pattern since 1970s. A sort of consumption showing the tendency of shifting from essential needs to the satisfaction of secondary needs is observed. Growing higher share of the non-food items than the food
items is another trend. A related development that is observed is the increasing amount of advertisements in the Medias about various consumer items both durable and non-durable articles. At least even one decade before the implementation of the New Economic Policy and the consequent formal globalisation of the country, the Gulf pockets of the Malabar region had started to substitute ‘global’ for ‘local’. This trend is visible in every sector including dress, food, entertainments etc.

A very pitiable phenomenon in the state and especially in the migrants’ concentrated areas is the change in the value sense of the people. The huge remittances and the consequent affluence have made people hedonistic in their attitude. The state has become number one in the per capita consumption of liquor. In this development, the northern districts stand ahead of the southern districts. The statistics available about the sale of the liquor by the Kerala State Beverages Corporation shows the extreme craze that the people of Malabar especially the Gulf pockets show. The increasing road accidents and suicides reported from the state are also to be read with this increasing alcoholic consumption and hedonistic life style. The death sentences awarded to the people of Malabar and especially to the people of Malappuram district in various Gulf countries in connection with the export of drugs are the manifestations of a society that is ready to do anything for amassing money. The links of the sex racket with the Gulf boom are also noticed. Systematic arrangement and strong net working of the sex rackets and their link with the visa rackets and album producers are also observed.

The ever-expanding business of tube money and hawala has started to threat the very law and order situations of the region. In corrupting the public offices especially the Emigration office, Passport Office Registration Office etc the Gulf money has played a big role. The emergence of new ‘middlemen’ or ‘brokers’ in every transaction has accelerated this corruption.
The physical facilities that increased by the remittance boom made the
houses of the migrants more or less well furnished and self sufficient in terms
of basic requirements. The facilities that were once available out door (eg.,
bathing facility, fuels, means of entertainments) are now accessible indoor.
This made the chances of coming out less especially of the housewives.
Social relations in the villages thus turned upside down as the people’s
contact became less. The social gatherings like marriages, local festivals etc
that were once the venues of people’s cooperation and mutual love have
become the scenes of demonstration of wealth.

A tendency that has been developing in the Gulf pockets is the growing
tendency of laziness especially among the migrants’ relatives. The work
participation in the Gulf areas is lower than the other places. It has become a
tendency among the relatives and also the natives to depend on the migrants
for anything and everything.

An important development that is observed after 1980s is the growth of
private health institutions and the weakening of public sector. In the growth of
private medical institutions the achievement of Malabar is relatively better.
Migrants and their relatives show a craze to be treated in private hospitals.
Though health facilities have developed very much, some undesirable trends
have been noticed. The rate of disease in the Gulf pockets has increased. Life
style diseases like blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, coronary diseases etc are
increasing.

Three important aspects of the Gulf migration have been observed.
Unlike other parallel migration from the state, in the Gulf migration the
migrants move from the country leaving their family behind. Secondly, most
of the migrants are young adults and probably the household head. Thirdly,
they send a huge amount whose main manipulators are women, who are less
educated and having very little managerial skill. The implications are
observed on four persons in the family – migrant himself, wives, children and parents. Long life in the desert diffusing the youth hood he comes once in two or three years like a migratory bird. The total alienation from the family and society is the net outcome.

The effect of migration on the women left behind is borne out of three factors – physical separation of their males, handling of money and management of household in the absence of the males. Gulf migration and the consequent changes have redefined the statuses and roles of various members in the family. In the traditional male-headed society of Muslim Malabar, the management of the affairs by women has raised their prestige in the society. Being the wife of migrant, she started to show more interest in education and understanding things. In short, Gulf migration helped empowering the women, a dream that used to be fondled by lovers of social change. The physical separation has also its mental and physical impact on women. The huge remittances at their disposal have also generated some undesirable tendencies among women.

The absence of father from home for two-three years has caused undesirable changes in behaviour in the children. The over pampering of parents, sufficient money at disposal etc have made many migrants children go astray. The disinclination of children towards study, squandering money etc has been noted. The onslaught of visual Medias, use of cell phones, personal computers etc are performing their own roles in devaluating the children. The elderly or the grand parents are not satisfied in the present set up. Though migration boom has made their life secure in terms of health, food etc they feel that their well respected position in the society has been reduced and they are mere care takers of the in-laws and grand children.

A very important development that is observed along the Gulf boom is the large-scale construction activities. A major share of the remittances, the
migrants spend for constructing palatial residential houses. This craze for posh concrete buildings has adversely affected the sensitive topography of the state. Since the man-land ratio is the highest in the state, supply of land plots for construction purpose is limited. In such a situation, paddy fields and marshy lands are filled and turned to housing plots. To fill these low lands soil from the adjoining hills are brought and a number of hillocks are levelled. Thus the construction activities play the role of a double-edged sword. The filling of low lands and levelling of high lands has serious environmental effect. Studies have found that the ground water level is fearfully lowering in the state. A relative problem is the excessive mining of sand from the rivers. This has been doing maximum harm to the very existence of various rivers in the state. Apart from sand mining quarrying of granite and laterite rocks are serious issues related to construction activities.

One of the major investment channels of the Gulf migrants is motor vehicles. The increase in number of motor vehicles is well noticed in the Gulf pockets. It has been found that the increase in the number of motor vehicles in the last three decades of twentieth century is twenty times.

Gulf boom has accelerated the rate of urbanization in the state. The growth of urbanization which was below the all-India level during 1971-81 shows a high development in the immediate decade. It exceeded the national average in the last decade of the last century. Unlike other states, urbanization in Kerala is not a development related to the growth of industries.

Agriculture, especially cultivation of rice showed a big decline since 1970s. This decline is observed in other important labour sectors including fishing. Migration caused this in many ways. The flow of about two million people to the Arabian Gulf means their withdrawal from their respective labour sectors which resulted in the shortage of experienced labourers in the related sectors. The lack of experienced labourers increased the wages of
labourers. The levelling of paddy fields for building houses reduced the size of agricultural lands. The huge external remittances made the non-migrants who are the relatives of the migrants more hedonistic and indifferent to work.

An important outcome that is observed is the social transformation that is taking place among the Muslims, the largest migrants contributing community. The contact with the outside world and the huge external remittances at hand, the community has started to show great change in the social and cultural outlook. Gulf money is the single most dynamic factor behind the transformation of this tradition-based community to a modern one. Gulf money is playing the same role among Muslims what Sri Narayana Guru played among Ezhavas. The orthodox Muslim organizations that once vehemently opposed to the western education and educating the girls are now the owners of huge educational complexes which consist of Womens’ colleges that provide English education.

The migration boom has given a death knell to indigenous architectural style of the mosques in Kerala. The Gulf money and also the migrants contact with the Islamic world changed their architectural concept which replaced the indigenous style with the saracenic style. Migration and consequent development have become themes for writers and artists. Books, films, songs etc are being brought out accordingly.

In a nutshell, the Malabar region especially the migrants’ pockets are undergoing a period of immense change from the economic, social, cultural and religious stand points. These changes involve both beneficial and negative from the developmental angles. The material affluence evident in these regions is mainly derived from the external remittances rather than any sustainable growth of the state’s economy. So it has only a limited life span and the euphoria it creates will not last long. Keeping this in view, in-depth studies should be made.