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**Indoor Religious Networks among Kerala's  
Traditional Muslims; Religious apartheid and  
migrant recourse in Pro-Fundamentalist Saudi  
Regime**

**M Abdul Fathah**



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# **Indoor Religious Networks among Kerala's Traditional Muslims; Religious apartheid and migrant recourse in Pro-Fundamentalist Saudi Regime**

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## Abstract

In the post-modern age, where religious identities have a direct bearing on the formation of transnational polity, the transitory and circulatory migration of Kerala Muslims in India into Saudi Arabia hold paramount importance in the sense that this 'sojourn' has been characterized with retained collective consciousness and partial alienation from host society. Nevertheless, the dominant narrative on religious recesses of Muslim migrants from the state of Kerala and abroad is anchored in a generalization that presupposes direct convergence between religious trajectory in the state and reformist Islam in Saudi Arabia, often idealizing this 'deculturation' in the religious realm. While this does much to attend to the general pattern of reformism in the state, arguably, does little to demonstrate large scale religious alienation felt by bearers of traditional religion in the predominantly Salafi host setup.

Concurrently, this alienation would shed light into interplay of local religious intricacies and specificities and low acculturation scores within Kerala Muslim migrants. The study shows that higher the estrangement with state religious policies, higher the tendency to form religious support networks and religious consciousness within the migrants, concomitant with the assumption that state sponsored religions are usually relegated into mere public constructs. Despite lacking public leverage, proliferation of traditional religious networks, recognizing themselves as kindred, in the face of 'religious apartheid' of Saudi regime unambiguously details their deep rooted consciousness about local tradition.

This paper draws critical attention to this placental cord running between religious alienation of Kerala Muslim migrants in the Saudi Arabia and traditional awareness, and dynamic relation with their origin as a major catalyst for the same.

**Keywords:** Kerala Muslims, Saudi Arabia, Migration, Alienation, Religious Affiliation.

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Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

# Indoor Religious Networks among Kerala's Traditional Muslims; Religious apartheid and migrant recourse in Pro-Fundamentalist Saudi Regime

**M Abdul Fathah**

## Introduction

Religion, migration and religious policy of host society is a discursive field in which many a prominent anthropologists, theorists and security advisors have made a remark. Kerala Muslims migration into gulf countries has been for long time a research topic in social and economic platform, while its religious recesses have only come into limelight with recent news of Muslim youth's alleged alignment with international Salafi radical terrorist networks. While gulf as a whole has been a transnational field in which Kerala Muslims interacted, Saudi Arabia is distinctively penciled while coming on to religious implications. The country's laws based on specific interpretation of Sharia i.e., by Salafi scholars, restrict religious freedom of citizens and public expression of other religious interpretations by migrants such as Sufi Sunni tradition of celebration of Birthday of Prophet Muhammad. The commission for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (CPVPV) and security forces of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) regularly conduct raids and checks on religious activism inside the country. Though the liberal policies of Muhammed Bin Salman, the crown prince, bought some restriction into the power of these institutions and there have been more or less no reports of raids in recent years, a bunch of restrictions still exist. However, Kerala Muslim Diaspora<sup>1</sup> has been surfacing Sunni-Sufi religious activism interwoven by secret religious conglomerations and organizational setups and had managed to keep a veil over the government. Since this activism is going smooth recently, they found it a means to overcome alienation from host society. This paper has been divided into five subtopics in which first I will draw a critical retrospection on dissent voices in Saudi Arabia and Kerala Muslims Religious trajectory. I would then dwell on alienation of these Diaspora and their mobilization around religious conglomerations. I will also provide a short note on Keralite Salafi Muslim networks that sync well with official Saudi interpretation.

## Methodology

<sup>1</sup> The word Diaspora was chosen to replace Migrants in the sense it is more apt to represent their migration that is a circulatory movement that necessitate their returning into home countries.

This work follows an anthropological and sociological research approach to broach the tensions and problematics mentioned above. While thinking about the placental cord running between religious alienation of Kerala Muslim migrants' and traditional awareness, this study substantially builds upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Saudi Arabia intermittently between April 2019 and May 2020 and included conversions, participant observation and interviews. During the first phase of which was between April 2019 and July 2019, I stayed in Al Batha district in Riyadh, the oldest commercial district of the province whose 70% economic activity is dominated by migrant workers mostly from South Asia. This district includes a number of migrant compounds and houses head offices and branches of many Keralite religious enterprises including Indian Cultural Foundation (ICF) and Risala Study Circle (RSC), the ones I engage with particular significance. During this and later visits into various districts, I advanced my fieldwork by profusely visiting migrant religious gatherings, both from traditional, puritan and reformist spectrum and building contacts with those who organized such events. During my extended stay in these premises, I was fortunate to navigate between documents, archives and magazines produced in relation with those organizations. Apart from current leaders of migrant organizations, I interviewed a few first-generation leaders and leaders of mother organization while being in Kerala to collect historical data with regard to their establishment, traditional activism and dynamic connections between the regions.

## Pro Salafi Saudi Arabia and Dissent Voices

The deep inroads molded out by country's involvement and Regulation of religion in the history have direct bearing upon the religious mosaic and affiliation of Saudi Arabia and subsequent trajectory of transnational and migratory variants. The lethargic religious denomination of the state loomed out in the wake of the decline of Hashemite Sunni empire in the country largely paved the way for consequent conundrums experienced by the state in applying its religious soft power across the Indian ocean. The official interpretation of Saudi state-Islam is derived from the writings and teachings of 18th century religious scholar Muhammad Bin Abdul

Wahhab ,who advocated an ultra conservative and austere interpretation and a return to what he considered as practices of first three generation of the Muslim era (Salaf).

Though Abdul Aziz bin Al Saud , the founder of the al Saud dynasty's alignment with Ikhwanis driven by political opportunism and expediency , religious motivation other than realpolitik found currency among many a members of royal family .For instance : many within kingdoms religious establishment and royal family viewed the global propagation of Islam as a religious obligation (fard) deeply intertwined with Saudi Arabia's privileged role as custodian of Islam's two holiest sites ( Mandeville and Hamid 2018:9). Its religious projection then was dictated against nationalist interpretation emanating from Jamal Abdunnasar and Kemalist attempts to secularize Islam. Later, Iranian revolution of 1979 consorted with cold war alignment with USA against soviet union delineated how purely cynical appropriation of religion for geopolitical ends by the country -or geo-sectarianism as called by Kamran Bokhari - would regenerate theological undercurrents. ( Ibid 2018: 9)

Nevertheless, dissent voices gained momentum among thousands of foreigners and people from eastern province recruited since discovery of oil in 1938 to sustain the oil production. The local oil company later renamed in 1944 as ARAMCO could not suffice with its unskilled population and thus enrolled people from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Sudan .These people hailing from countries with intensive radical activism encompassed Baathists , Pan Arab nationalists , Syrian nationalists and Nasserites intermingled and disseminated these ideas among civilian population( Matthiesen 2014:477) .Thus, “ The gulf region as a whole become a transnational field in which ideas, students and revolutionaries travelled across national borders and increased political mobilization in other countries” ( Ibid 2014:478) .Inter alia, protests and dividend movements in the oil rich industrial cities of eastern province marked how migrants orchestrated clandestine movements and that certain mobilization on class lines were quite familiar among migrants since 1950s .While Saudi state easily appropriated Wahhabism to harshly crackdown and repress those leftist and secular ideologies , it also showed how the language of Islam therefore also became the discursive field in which the hegemonic politics of the Saudi state could be challenged ( Ibid 2014:503).

Acknowledging such an explicit radical tendency from these nationals,Saudi government was vigil enough to opt for workers from south Asia in the stringent belief that they are far easier to contain, but still belonging to Muslim majority countries such as. Pakistan,Bangladesh and Indonesia and countries with significant Muslim population such as India, Srilanka and Philippine. It was strongly perceived that they could be easily sent back to their country to uproot any dissident voices (Ibid 2014:502) and that highly heterogeneous belief and cultural systems persisting

among them could stall any sort of cooperation on local-religious grounds. Moreover, this Saudi Arabia's initiative was partly deemed to conform to studies embarking upon transnational migration by focusing on the local and national organization holding stake in home and host countries and the relationship underlying them. Peggy Levitt explicitly underscore that individuals from countries with little separation between church and state are more likely to be transnational activists than those from countries with greater religious pluralism like India because their motivation for doing so grows out of two sources i.e. the state and religion, that strengthen each other (Levitt 2002:8), as was the case with earlier migrants from middle eastern countries. While this does much to evaluate transnational activism, does fail to account to migration specific clandestine mobilizations that have no political ends. Secret conglomerations and more recent virtual places are hot beds of such mobilization around religious and cultural lines that find exponential hike among South Asian migrants, but left undisturbed for most of the time. With all its strategic experience in dealing with apparent political and religious organizations with that struck empire with iron hands,Saudi Arabia found it a herculean task to efficiently check this migrant activism among South Asians and for most of the time doesn't seriously consider them as a threat enough to engender a mystic Sunni religious matrix in the state.

This disarming mobilization among the south Asians are expected to root deep at the expense of social amiability with the host population and latter's aversion to the same, a widespread tendency among civilian population has been to recognize those from middle East - fewer but still significant number from Lebanon ,Syria and Egypt - as an integral part of the country's societal make up while south Asians are largely left to the periphery of the society , the result being that the former returned to their home countries with stricter, more conservative mode of Islam while latter largely stick on to indigenous variant. According to 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom published by US Department of State,Saudi Arabia with 18.6 million citizen population and 8.5 million foreign workers has an approximately 85%to 90% of Sunni citizens -encompassing Sufi mystics, traditional Sunnis and state supported Salafi sect simultaneously aligning with Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence- and 10 to 15 percent of Shia citizens, of which 80% are Twelver Shia .A large share of migrants pledge their allegiance to various local variants of Sunni Islam, but there are also 250000 Hindus, 70000 Buddhists and approx. 45000 Sikhs and others.

### **Religion, Trans-nationalism and Mobilization**

Religious denomination, ethos and practices are a corner stone of any kind of migration and undergo dynamic development in progress .Cherry highlights that “religious adherents, communities, ideas and practices have always fluidly transcended borders , making them some of the

oldest transnational entities in existence.( Sanders, Snyder , Qasmiyeh 2016:23) Smith(1978) went a step ahead and argued that immigration itself is a ‘theologizing’ experience in the sense that migrants in the process of transcending the transplantation trauma largely turn into religion and it’s conglomerations.( Massey 2011:1) However, Peggy Levitt points to little study undertaken on these religious links between post migration societies and their origins. My own point here is that this decadence owes a great deal for typical migrations to western countries of Europe and America characterized with a blind severance of all relations with motherland. The social and political insurgency in homeland, as in Africa and Middle East, and haste towards embracing an affluent western life preclude any future reciprocity with homeland, as necessitated by circumstances. Accounting to a lion’s share of European Population, these societies seem to adapt to European atmosphere, with many families securing citizenship rights from host countries. Moreover, increasing religiosity is not a typical character of all migrants “Detailed analysis of reported church attendance at places of origin in the US suggest that immigration is a disruptive event that alienates immigrants from religious practice rather than alienating them”( Ibid 2011:1).

In contrast, Triggering from the first half of precarious 1960s and thus, redefining the matrix of Kerala, situated in the far end of southern India bordering Indian Ocean, the religious implication of this transitory and circulatory movement of Kerala Muslims into Gulf, especially oil rich Saudi Arabia, has an added significance in the post modern age where religious communities have become vigil agents in the formation of transnational civil society. Apart from poverty bequeathed from colonial subjugation and disillusionments in Communist- Nexalantidotes, early historians presuppose key historical underpinnings which dictated the earlier Kerala Muslim migration into gulf countries .To an extent,Kerala’s maritime relationships with Middle East in the medieval period, propagation trajectory of Arab Sufis and earnest interest in the power and pelf of the bygone era, made it a haven for them. The cataclysmic invasion of Baghdad under Mongols and subsequent creation of a global system in the Indian Ocean, interwoven by ports such as Yemen, Jeddah and Musris.etc, offered an idyllic environment for the earlier migration. Long before Europeans crept into the eastern waters, Hadhramis, cutting loose from the motherland for the noble cause of propagation, employed them brilliantly. The transnational nature of Islam as a monotheistic belief along with Muslim inclination towards trade as a livelihood played no less role in Islamically appropriating this sea route. Many scholars have even termed trade as a Muslim occupation.

Arjomand in his influential work contemplating on the relationship between political change and globalization throws light to the decisive changes that have come about in the course of time in the motives behind migration. Heopinions opines that in contradiction to old pattern of

globalization, where religion was the motive force behind globalization, globalization in the 20th century is a much broader process as it set in motion not by religion, but by New cultural and technological forces that are entirely secular. Nevertheless, to my extend, as Bayer points out, migration in Kerala context has more or less accidentally fortified both the societal and communal dimensions of the religion as it is an effective resource for mobilizing people across social cleavages such as stratum, class, religion and local cultures (Hasan 2011:149)

If to follow Pusthan’s argument, the Diasporic character of Kerala Muslim Diasporareligion hinge for most part on the migrant community’s perception of its homeland religion(Sanders, Snyder &Qasmiyeh 2016:23). In fact, Islam when reached to various pockets, has integrated with local culture on one side and had tried to mold up culture suited to its thriving on the other . (Hussain 2008:23). Islam in these locations! legitimized local culture derived from other communities with a pre requisite that it is supported by broad walls of Sharia .Urf( local customs) are often taken as reference. As a matter of fact, Islam in India developed in a more or less distanced from the Arabian mainland after the initial years of its arrival.

They had often developed their own spirituality that centered around Sufis who did not premise the religion on historical narratives of Dar-ul-Islam (Abode of faith) , cults and religious festivals that opened up opportunities of Bakthenian Carnival, thus giving a kind of sacredness to the country itself. This owes a great deal to the shift of political centrality of Muslim Empire from Hijaz to Damascus and gradually to Constantinople.Azad Bilgrami, a seventeenth century Scholar even ‘ described India as the place where the eternal light of Muhammed first manifested in Adam, while Arabia is where it found its final expression in the form of physical form of Prophet. While this description can be read as an ideological ‘invention of the tradition’ in the Hobsbawmion sense, it is also reveals Azad Bilgrami’s eagerness to show that ‘ India was in all ways closely linked to the essence of the Islamic faith’( Jaffrelot&Loure 2017).

From the 20th century, the oil wealth of Arabia began to engender what they consider as ‘true Islam ‘, whether it is Salafism or Shiesm that is devoid of cultural links on the rest of the Muslim world, and migrants a close option in the process. Roy’s discussion on Religious market is central to this debate of whether Kerala Muslim Diaspora would now succumbed to discrete homogenizing force ( John Meyer 1997) or they would assert localizes and particularistic identities before this element of globalization (Robertson 1991). In Roy’s diction, this true Islam proposed by them is the “decontextualised” and “standardized religion” that is stripped off its cultural context through radical interchange. From an Islamic angle, this suits beat to Salafism that approach religion from a point of “ holy ignorance”( Roy 2010:144) i.e. literal interpretation of scripture devoid of institutional

or cultural guidance. For Kerala Muslim Diaspora who are partially on margins, this offer a grave as the form of religion best suited to these condition is fundamentalism (Ibid 2010:115). Cultural markers of Kerala Muslim Diaspora, renewed dynamically through local religious self help groups and locally driven new technological opportunities, which could have rather an absolute de-territorializing factor (Ibid 2010:164), is thus a defining strategy by which they keep extreme steps at back burner which otherwise would bring grave repercussions to their continued existence in the country

The growth of Keralite Islam solely at the hands of religious scholars in contrast to menacing influence of state Islam has been another cardinal point to take into account. Long before ideas of nationalism or secularism did emerge, Mappila mindset was anchored in hostility towards any powers curtaining religious freedom and fraternity towards those powers rendering those liberties. (Hussain 2008:34) this is the reason why despite the presence of some of Islamic dynasties in the area, religious authority largely remained on the hands of scholars. Moreover, the dimension of Islamic nation which gives a whole capacity as regards to time and space provide that Islam could be accommodated within other Religio- Communal concepts in accordance with contemporary political situation. International Islamic Scholars such as Usama Zaid Al Azhari, writes that the cardinal task of integrating Ummah on Islamic social, cultural and economical mosaic as the cornerstone of political integration with no coercion is assigned on the religious scholars. (Usama2014:pp183-193)

### **Alienation and Religious Consolidation among Kerala Muslim Diaspora**

While diasporas' life in general and Kerala Muslim religious recesses in particular could render sufficient means for consolidation and mobilization on religious lines, sustaining and rejuvenation of the process owe a great deal to social marginalization and partial alienation from the host society. Further, it is conceivable that it is not the stress of migration, but the stress of living in an alien culture that may be more relevant in diasporic distress and mental illness. (Dinesh 2004:132) Though it is generally identified in migration culture that low score of acculturation leads to higher levels of alienation from the host society, it is equally important that how the host society welcomes and conceives them. Though six domains in terms of behavioral pattern are linked with acculturation, including language, religion, entertainment, food, shopping habits, cognitive and behavioral styles (Ibid 2004:134), Saudi multitude seem to largely employ the prejudice of being a South Asian origin to keep them at bay despite being that counter mobilization come largely on indigenous local religious lines that disjunct with Saudi state Salafism. This point becomes unambiguously at seeing how Sunni traditional Yemenis and Egyptians are far better despite their religious background. The case is somewhat similar behind relatively low or no attendance of Saudi

Sunnis who religiously align with Kerala Muslims in the latter religious organizations and conglomerations

Meanwhile, a pervasive tendency that cements such a perception in Saudi Arabia seem to be the authoritative mindset of the host society that show case South Asian migrants as subordinate, less religious, ignorant and culturally and socially downgraded with a blind severance to societal and economic make up of each one of them. This prejudice in fact is in line with how Islamophobia in European countries such as Britain emerge as a wholesale threat to all South Asian battling religious and ethical boundaries. A typical issue is how stereotyping of Muslims poses difficulties for Sikhs and Hindus who are often racialized as "Pakis" (Werbner 2004:484). However, not that I argue that Muslims migrants among South Asians are not favoured above other non-Muslim from the same community, nonetheless, in a Muslim country with sizzling variety of Muslimness, state interpretation band territorial difference generates significant impact. From such a vantage point, they consider it an imperative to educate and inculcate there own ultraconservative interpretation of Islam into the latter's psyche. a more detailed description of such initiatives of the Saudi government would be elaborated in following sections. This system in the country loomed out in a direct contrast to Ottoman millet system which Roy point out (Roy 2010:78) to be an example in which the population was divided into different religious groups and bought under the control of the governing authority. The consequences of this were that diverse Islam was reduced to present a single face. Roy while maintaining such a. Strategy to do away with racial discrimination suggests in regard to plural USA that: it is better to be a Hindu than an Indian as a Buddhist than Asian. This method to demarcate people of one religion under one label helped Ottoman Empire to not to regard language spoken, other ethnic markers and observation of 'traditional' customs as markers of distinction (Ibid 2010:82).

Another practical reason behind host population's aversion towards them reaches back to self helping and local specific orientation of this organization in Saudi Arabia. While it's sister organizations in Other GCC countries with lesser government restriction embed a profound transnational character by imbibing local civilian population, such an attempt is still at its proto period among organizations in Saudi Arabia. While these organizations could still be designated with a transnational character in a broad meaning, transnational processes as anchored in the definition spanning two or more nation states involving actors from the spheres of both state civil society is largely absent in the sense that sole members of them are migrants who are 'mobile livelihood citizens'. Rather, as like the ties between Dominican migrants in Boston to their sending community, many of the economic, social and political transnational activities that these individuals engage in are directed towards these local level sites (Levitt 2001). Dietrich Reetz in his work 'Migrant, Mujahideen, Madrasa students, the diversity of transnational



Islam in Pakistan “ draws a similar disjunction between Sufi and Salafi reformist propagational trajectories in Pakistan . While transnational global orientation and transnational political and ideological outlook is largely constitutive for Salafi or reformist movements like JI and Ahle Hadith, transnational religious orientation derivative of connection with Muslim migrant communities is the striking feature of Barelwi network of Sunni traditional such as Minhajul Quran. (Reetz 2009:61) Verily, transnational activism is not altogether absent and does stage among stalwarts of Keralaite Sunni organization and Sunni Scholars from Saudi Arabia to a like extend precisely in official setups.

One of the pressing issues confronted by the whole flock of Kerala migrants to Saudi Arabia, particularly the first generation migrants who largely kept their families in home countries, has been a drastic transplantation from a collectivist society to an individualist society. These migrants, mostly allocentric, are bound by relationships and prioritize common good and harmony. Arguably, these individuals will face different types of stresses if they migrate to an individualistic society and their social links are with idiocentric individuals (Dinesh 2004:157), finally ending up in community mobilization and conglomerations as an antidote. Nevertheless, though host society ‘s perception of South Asian have bearing upon alienation process, a favourable hike in professional migration that followed semi skilled and unskilled workers - as is the case with Mexicans in the USA and east Europeans in UK- (Raman 2012:193) seem to be a belated yet welcome development that could possibly eschew prejudices and alienation among at least educated Arabs , reason being that it put an abiding liability on these employers to duly consider them and provide meaningful life amenities. This would probably bring into question the continuity of self help and local specific religious groups loomed largely in response to marginalisation that directly and indirectly benefited religious and social edifice of Kerala region. In fact, even though self-help groups and religious groups are expected to be in a diminishing stage, the space vacated by them would be increasingly taken up by transnational religious actors provided that new realms opened up could attract civilian population into these transnational organizations, at least those who conform to Sunni traditional interpretation of Islam.

### **Pattern of Religious Conglomerations among Kerala Muslim Diaspora**

Arguably, religious enthusiasm is an implausible aspect related to migrant life superimposed by alienation on any base or pretext and shows a gradual increase in the context of Kerala Muslim Diaspora with distinct relation with home setting. Notwithstanding the emerging trend towards personal interpretation, individualization and privatization in almost all realms of Muslims with the advent of liberalism, religious affirmation of Kerala Muslim Diaspora in Saudi Arabia continues to be regulated by collective practices and conglomerations-based activisms. Though Transnational

religious practice often take place in individualized, informal setting, an important part of Transnational religious life occurs within organizational contexts (Levitt 2002: 9). “ The personal interpretation implies that Islam is understood as having personalized meaning and that one’s religion can provide personal certainty. Such an interpretation involves the belief that Islam is a private matter between the believer and the God and that one should be religious in ones own personal way. This interpretation also involves a search for personal religiosities that can result in self confidence about bring a Muslim, but also in uncertainty about one self.” (Lewis 2007)

Though exclusions and lack of recognition could have lead Kerala Muslim Diaspora into personal interpretation and an uncertainty about oneself, the presence of an alternative platform in the form of religious conglomerations allow the to stick to Communal interpretation of being a Muslim. Communal interpretation and thus consolidation come more with behavioural involvement and psychological commitment which an investment of self to religious in group (Ellemers, Kortekaas , Ouwkerk 1999). To broach the working of religious organisations of Kerala Muslim Diaspora in the pro-salafi Saudi Arabia in line with aforementioned characteristics and pattern, I will exemplify the organizational structure and audience of ICF (Islamic Cultural Foundation) and RSC (Risala study circle), branches of SYS (founded in 1954) and SSF (founded in 1973) respectively, two organizational wings of Samastha Kerala Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama (AP faction) ,one of the two traditional religious organization that has been at the front pew of religious and social renaissance in the post colonial Kerala milieu. Earlier in 1980s, various religious organizations promoted and advocated by migrant members of this religious organization were present in few pockets in Gulf countries, namely Muslim Jamaath of Oman and Markaz Committees across the gulf which specifically channelled big financial help for Markaz Saqafathu-Sunniyya, a major reeducational institution of AP faction. However, they were not strictly steered by AP Samastha’s organizational setup and were locality based. On November 23 1994, the first Gulf branch of RSC was embarked upon at Deraservani masjid, Dubai, popularly known among cadres as Qadisiyya proclamation. Through the formation of RSC is distinct from ICF and Markaz Committees in that, in long term it was a result of particular local migratory configuration than financial help, an immediate push factor has been the need to systemize financial help from abroad due to the financial crisis faced by Sunni Student Federation (SSF) in Kerala owing to the existential crisis faced by its publication, Risala and a number of other debts. Verily, it took more than, five years to form a similar branch in the highly restricted atmosphere of Saudi Arabia. Though the local branches were disintegrated at its proto period with no much communication in between, after a proposal from Ali Akbar, a prominent Malayali Journalist and several round of debates surrounding local reluctance to such an authoritative

body, Gulf chapter was formed on 31st December 2006 and marked the zenith of organization pattern integrating all local branches and mother organization. The organization now has branches in almost 500 localities across Gulf countries and has a four-tier system consisting of unit, zone, national and Gulf chapters.

This organization have now become for many migrants a world into themselves where there is a combination of social and symbolic ties. Social ties come in the form of cultural, political and economic processes such accumulation, use and affects of different capitals such as economic (eg. Financial capital), human (e.g. Skills and know how) and social (Resources inherent in social and symbolic ties), their volume and convertibility (T Faist 2000:8). Some of the programs deployed for these migrants on conglomeration basis are Weekly DikrHalqas (chanting religious hymns), Sahithyolsav (Cultural fest) and Kalalayam Cultural camps, Student conferences, Wisdom camps for professionals, Ifthar camps and Hadiya Women Camps. most of these programs follow timely circulars received from Mother organization in Kerala dictating their model of conduct. DikrHalqas follow specially compiled Hymns such as Mahdhara Al Badiriyyah, that are followed among Keralite. These conglomeration have a dual function of also acting as a platform for bringing together and shaping individual opinion about various crises affecting the individual and migrant community as a whole. Newcomers with same religious background are connected to the local branches by the mother organization itself, often prior to their migration, therefore forming an interactive network that include migrants, mother organisations and their transnational branches. Moreover, the unparalleled joy of communion provided by them cum spiritual atonement used to entice many migrants reeling under employment uncertainty and loneliness. Dinesh Bhurga in his article "Migration, distress and cultural identity" discusses a similar situation in which Punjabi women in UK maintained the belief that depression was not a medical condition. They sought help from religious practitioners and reading scriptures rather than seeking medical help from statutory services because they believed that this stigmatizes them and their families (Dinesh 2004:134).

An arresting character of these organizations is that they cunningly make use of all government initiatives and incentives they could avail in order to carry out their activities though public exposition is strictly restricted by the government. Publications and Hajj-Umra pilgrimage services are a major platform where appropriations take place in mass scale. Samastha owns two Hajj-Umra services namely Al Qudus and Al Sahaba that conduct Umr services on weekend and special Hajj packages for migrants all over the country. While they remain pure business ventures in the eyes of government, these services guided by tradition Sunni scholars attract Muslim traditional Kerala Sunni migrants longing for religious guides in these matters and pilgrimage to Prophet's shine in Medina which government

services dis-encourage on Salafi grounds. These journeys are in fact a mobilization strategy for these organizations looking for bearers potential believers of traditional Sunni sect and. Publications such as Pravasi<sup>2</sup>Risala started in 2009 and PravasiVayana started in 2015 are also a mobilization strategy. Though these magazines with largest number of Malayaali Readers are often subjected to government censorship and thus forced to avoid anti- government works, they tune their readers to underground traditional Sunni organizations. The mother organizations in Kerala also sent Daees (propagators) to organize its activities and collect funds for homeland through legitimate visas in the guise of house drivers and other employers. Other appropriations include centering cultural programs and camps at Indian school premises managed by private ownership

Indoor Madrasa<sup>3</sup> conducted under the aegis of ICF, RisalathulIslam Madrasa is the locus of the working of these organizations, given the context that they are restricted to build Mosques of their own that had long been the center of Islamic religious propagation and still center of mobilization among South Asian migrants in the west. Soaring influx of families along with bachelor migrants was a major catalyst for the formation of these Madrasas which are registered and affiliated to educational boards of Samastha Kerala Sunni Vidhyabhyasa Board. Presently, there are 17 of such Madrasas in the province of Riyadh alone. While it helps to impart traditional Sunni education to children, it is also a way by which families are attracted to these organizations. In fact, even after schools run by traditional Sunnis have secretly started to provide traditional madrasa education to a limited extent, migrant families are seen to stick to Madrasas owing to their activism beyond imparting religious education to students.

A similar orientation that provesthis organization's inclusiveness is among many organizers of these groups who are well heeled and self sustain enough to discard these self-help groups. However, they remain attached to these immigrant religious communities in the sense that it is more than a self-help group that provides mental belief and ethical support. An important aspect of these Madrasas and other conglomeration is the place where they are staged. Since public expositions are strictly prohibited, flats, private enclosed parks and auditoriums are used at convenience.

Competitive cultural mobilization (Reetz 2009:60) bequeathed from Mother organizations in Kerala is a defining aspect of many of these migrant outfits. While at the same time locking horns with migrant Salafi counterparts, they also compete with other Sunni Traditional organizations Such as SKSSF, a youth organizational wing of another fraction (EK faction) of Sunnis formed following a split in original Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama in 1989, thus adding to there local identity. However, this competition with both ideologically similar and distinct groups helps

<sup>2</sup> Malayalam word for Diaspora

<sup>3</sup> Institutions Providing primary, secondary and higher secondary Islamic Religious education

consolidate these organizations from Salafi networks and dynamically renew their propagational strategies in the face of new threats. Hajj-Umra services, Hajj volunteering, Reliefs and Madrasas are major platforms where this competition is evident. However, at the same time pan ethnic mobilization occur occasionally and is born out of racialized dumping of a group as homogeneous by outsiders (Nagel 1986). The issue of Nitaqat or Nationalisation of Jobs that had wider ramification for all of Kerala Diaspora was a recent platform for pan ethnic mobilization that attract almost all organization among Keralites barring religious and cultural differences. In the same way Jenny Park notes in case of AsiaAmericans, racialization pushes Keralite migrants into pan ethnic identity, whereas multi religious framework intensified the identities rooted in uniqueness and authenticity (Park 2008).

### **Migrant Salafi Networks and Acculturation attempts**

While mobilization and consolidation on traditional SunniSufi Islam has been the locus of KeralaMuslim religious affiliation, a small share of migrants have also opted to merge with Saudi Salafism and thus employ incentives provided in the process of Saudi project of spreading Wahhabism or Saudi Salafism. This owes a great deal to religious remittance of Saudi government into KeralaMuslim milieu that fuelled reformist tendencies in the state during 1920s. Though Egyptian Salafism and its proponents such as Rasheed Ridha and Muhammed Abdu were major inspirations, Aikya Sangam, first Salafi organization in Kerala and later Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen (KNM) largely made use of Saudi funds. Presently, according to information furnished by Saudi embassy in Delhi, millions of Riyals have been provided for Islamic mission trust of Malappuram, the Islamic welfare trust and the palghatMujahideen ArabicCollege. Recently, Popular friend of India and Social democratic party of India in Kerala have also started to receive Saudi financial support (Jaffrelot&Louer 2017). Filippo and Caroline Osello put the influence of this SaudiWahabism on migrants in the following way “not only has Gulf migration brought thousands of Malayali-Muslims close to what they imagine as the heartland of Islam and exposed them with all ensuing contradiction and ambivalences -to life in Muslim majority countries, but it has also renewed ties with Arab religious scholars. There is a sense of participating in a world wide renaissance of Islamic moral values and culture “( Osella and Osella 2007:9)

However, while some of the migrants are ardent supporters of this mode of Islam, a large part of them are unorthodoxMuslims who largely go with flow without any serious religious affiliation. The former group of migrants began organization in line with their mother organization KNM on 1980s, named Islahi Centers, though they had been maintaining links with SaudiSalafi scholars for past many decades. These people see themselves associated with Saudi state Islam and receive large number of benefits on religious ground. Some of them include use of government

machinery for propagation an use of government funded religious educational institutions. They are also free to conduct religious activism free of any restriction.The presence of this inflow of SaudiIslam through couple of migrants has have repercussions to the state in the form of radical Islam consequent turn out of youth into international terrorist outfits. In his book length description of Saudi soft power, Joseph Nye unambiguously draws on this connection between rascal Islam and Saudi Wahhabism. However, at the same time he says that “The soft power of Wahhabism has not proved to be a resource that the Saudi government could control, instead it has been like a sorcerer’s apprentice that has come back to bedevil its original creator.”(Joseph 2004:96)

While this tendency among Muslim migrants is on an exponential hike at the global level, what distinguishes Kerala Muslim Diaspora in Saudi Arabia is their attempt to largely remain outside Saudi influence, and this tendency to mobilize and organize on traditional religious lines by majority of migrants stems arguably from alienation from host society, cultural background of KeraliteIslam and their dynamic relationship with homeland organization.The question as to their mobilization despite religious affiliation with Saudi state is an important element in our discussion. Though these organizations are favoured religiously, these migrants are too stigmatized as South Asian as long as they opt to have relationship with their motherland. Moreover, these common migrants with a salafi affiliation are not largely favoured in formal employment and other social matters than traditional SunniSufi oriented migrants. They are also no less aware of religio-social climate of their regions and vigorously respond to these developments, difference being that they constantly try to reform their regional religion in line with Saudi state religion. These people returned to their home countries with a stricter more conservative variant of Islam in much the same way Camilla Gibbs (Gibbs 1998) and Katy Gardner (K Gardner 1995) highlighted the puritanistic dogmatic forms of Islam embraced by Muslim return migrants in Harare and Bangladesh.

### **Conclusion**

A serious contemplation into the lifestyle and working of religious conglomeration among Kerala Muslim Diaspora unambiguously tell us that there is a placental cord running between social, economic, political alienation they confront from Saudi civil society and the pattern of Religious activism among them.Thus, their indigenous religion becomes a counterweight against acculturation from the host society. To transcend the trauma of such alienation, majoritylooks into some sort of conglomerations and a large share of them reside in indigenous religious conglomerations. The over arching characters of these organization that lead to their dynamic existence in Saudi Arabia despite kingdom’s strict religious rules are their aversion to political character of religion, their close connection with Keralite culture and their role as self help groups that cunningly make use of

government benefits rather than negating them. However, with the country moving on to more liberal policies, chances are that these conglomerations would take up profound character of transnational organizations that too accumulate civilian population. Thus, it would be expected that religious influence would give away its unidirectional character of Saudi influence on South Asians and would yet again take up reciprocal nature as recent studies show how Sufism, a mystical variant within Islam, well rooted in South Asia, find new roots in Gulf region.

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