

**Under representation of Muslims in Higher Education: How and Why the  
Kerala Story is Somewhat Different?**

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### **Abstract**

The study has gone into the historical and socio-economic factors underlying the comparatively better representation of Muslims in higher education in Kerala. Historically, the Mappila Muslims of Malabar who forms 72% of Muslims in Kerala were educationally much backward than their counterparts in Travancore and Cochin. While Malabar was part of the Madras Province of British India, Travancore and Cochin were princely states.

The Mappila Muslims of Malabar always had a strained relationship with the British. This together with conservative attitude resulted in extreme backwardness of Muslims in modern education. After independence, Malabar became part of unified Kerala following re-organisation of states on linguistic lines. Malabar Muslims caught up very fast with other communities in the post- independence period. The major contributing factors are the Indian Union Muslim League's holding Education portfolio for quite a long time, social reform movements, Muslim Educational Society and Gulf remittances. Of the four factors, the last one namely Gulf remittances has been a game changer as far as Muslim education is concerned. Kerala opened up higher education sector for private investment in 2000. Armed with disposable surpluses earned from the Gulf countries, Muslims entered the higher education sector in a big way by opening several self-financing institutions.

Though Kerala Muslims could overcome the educational backwardness to a great extent, education of young Muslims is confronted by new challenges. The tendency of young and educated Muslims to get swayed by extremist/fundamentalist ideas is a cause of concern. How the community negotiates with these challenges and forges ahead is crucial for the future of Muslim education in Kerala.

## **Under representation of Muslims in Higher Education: How and Why the Kerala Story is Somewhat Different?**

### **Introduction**

This study is part of an all India study on under representation of Muslims in higher education in India by Vikas Anvesh Foundation. Following the Sachar Committee Report (SCR 2006) and Ranganath Misra Commission Report(RMCR 2007), backwardness of Muslims in general and under representation in higher education in particular has attracted the attention of academics (see for example Rahman 2018) and policy makers. According to All India Survey of Higher Education(AISHE) 2017-18, Muslim enrolment in higher education in India is only 5%. The extent of under representation and the contributory factors differs between states. One state which presents a somewhat different picture is Kerala. This paper traces the historical and socio-economic factors that made this possible by surveying the available literature and piecing together evidences from various secondary sources. An attempt is also made to analyse the emerging problems that the Muslim education scenario in the state faces. This section is partly based on discussions with a sample of Muslim college alumnus and professionals on the one hand and academics, educationalists, and Muslim elders on the other.

### **Muslim presence in Kerala: A historical and spatial overview**

Unlike other parts of India, Islam reached Kerala coast through peaceful means. *Mappilas* as the Muslims of Malabar are known, are either descendants of Arab traders or Hindu converts to Islam. The earliest Islamic influences came to the Malabar part of Kerala coast through the Arabs almost immediately after the faith was founded, at any rate before the end of the seventh century. Muslim population in Malabar increased from 21% in 1807 to 33% in 1921(Panikkar 1992:50-51). Compared to Malabar, Muslim population in Travancore and Cochin parts of Kerala coast was small. This is evident from the distribution of Muslim population in the present day Kerala which was formed in 1956 by merging the Travancore-Cochin state with Malabar which was part of the Madras state. As table-1 shows, almost 72% of Muslims belong to the Malabar region of Kerala.

**Table 1: Community-wise distribution of Kerala population as per Census 2011\***

District	Hindus		Muslims		Christians	
	No.	% to total Hindus	No.	% to total Muslims	No.	% to total Christians
Trivandrum	21,94,057	12.00	4,52,915	5.10	6,30,573	10.27
Kollam	16,97,635	9.29	5,08,500	5.73	4,21,598	6.86
Pathanamthitta	6,81,666	3.73	55,074	0.62	4,56,404	7.43
Alappuzha	14,60,447	7.99	2,24,545	2.53	4,35,056	7.08
Kottayam	9,83,598	5.38	1,26,499	1.43	8,58,608	13.98
Idukki	5,41,854	2.96	82,206	0.93	4,81,507	7.84
Ernakulam	15,09,557	8.26	5,14,397	5.80	12,48,137	20.32
Thrissur	18,23,442	9.97	5,32,839	6.00	7,57,484	12.33
Palakkad	18,75,980	10.26	8,12,936	9.16	1,14,397	1.86
Malappuram	11,352,59	6.21	28,88,849	32.56	81,556	1.33
Kozhikkode	17,34,958	9.49	12,11,131	13.65	1,31,516	2.14
Wyanad	4,04,460	2.21	2,34,185	2.64	1,74,453	2.84
Kannur	15,09,592	8.26	7,42,483	8.37	2,62,526	4.27
Kazargod	7,29,987	3.99	4,86,913	5.49	87,454	1.42
TC	1,08,92,256	59.58	24,96,975	28.13	52,89,367	86.13
Malabar	73,90,236	40.42	63,76,497	71.87	8,51,902	13.87
Kerala	1,82,82,492	100.00	88,73,472	100.00	61,41,269	100.00
% to Kerala population	54.72		26.56		18.40	

\*The number of people following other religions is less than one percentage of total population.

Source: Census of India 2011, Registrar General of India.

At the time of formation of the state, Malabar was much backward than Travancore-Cochin<sup>1</sup>. While the level of Muslim literacy in Travancore-Cochin was more or less comparable to the general level of literacy there, the level of Muslim literacy in Malabar was much below that of the general population. The factors contributing to educational backwardness of Mappila Muslims of Malabar demand a closer look.

### **Educational backwardness of Muslims in Malabar**

Known as Mappilas, the Muslims of Malabar are culturally different from Muslims of Travancore and Cochin. Mappilas are either the descendants Arab traders or of Hindu converts to Islam. They were participants and collaborators of Arab traders. In the post-1500 period, the Arabs lost their supremacy in maritime trade to the British. They viewed Mappilas with suspicion as Mappilas were collaborators of Arabs. In the subsequent years, the British engaged in a protracted war with Mysore rulers, Hyderali and Tipu Sultan to take control over Malabar. Hyderali and Tipu being Muslim rulers, the British assumed that the Muslims of Malabar supported the invaders, though there is evidence that some of them did oppose the latter (Panikkar 1992: 50-56). The agrarian policies followed by the British reduced the Mappila

Muslims to perennial harassment at the hands of their Hindu landlords resulting in their periodic uprisings. The ferocity with which these were suppressed and the British attempts to 'modernise' them had exactly the opposite result- an inward looking tendency and indifference to modern education(Mathew 1987: 71).

The hatred towards western education extended even to the study of Malayalam, the mother tongue of Mappila Muslims. From very early times, Muslims of Kerala had their religious studies through the medium of Arabic. They were biased against Malayalam because it was fraught with the ideology and superstitions of Hinduism(Ali 1990:77 quoted by Salim and Nair 2002). Their love for Arabic and indifference to Malayalam led to the development of a new script called Arabic Malayalam in which Arabic script is used to transcribe Malayalam. The pitiable condition of Mappila Muslims in modern education is evident from table- 2.

**Table 2: Education in Malabar District in 1871**

	No. of Literates		Literates per 1000 of population		Literates in English	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	3,16,307	78728	209	50	26,740	5171
Hindus	2,44,081	66,529	247	63	21,349	2286
Musalman	58,820	3565	119	7	1198	29
Christians	12,994	8567	451	293	4128	2813
Others	142	67	516	234	65	43

Source: C.A Innes, Madras District Gazetteers, Malabar, p.108 as reported in Mathew(1987)

The British government realised that the best safeguard against the recurrence of Mappila outbreaks would be to spread of modern education among them(Innes 1951:300 quoted by Salim and Nair 2002: 128). In 1871, the government appointed a Committee to look into the question of Muslim education in Malabar. To quote Salim and Nair(2002):

“A plan was devised for improving instruction given in the *Othupallis*(schools) attached to every mosque. The government made arrangements to teach Malayalam(reading and writing) and arithmetic in the *Othupallis*. This was done with the help of *Mullas*(priests) who were given special instruction to teach the children elementary lessons in Malayalam along with religious training they imparted. The government gave the *Mullas* small salaries and grants on the basis of the number of children attending such schools(innes, 1951:300). The refusal of the Mappilas to attend primary schools opened for Hindus also stood in the way of their educational progress. The government opened special schools named Mappila primary schools in Malabar”(p.128)

But the Mappilas did not come forward to attend these schools in large numbers. The “number of Mappila pupils in these schools was exceedingly low”( Ali 1990).

The slow but steady development of modern education among the Mappilas suffered a severe setback from the outbreak of Mappila rebellion of 1921<sup>2</sup>. The rebellion and its ruthless suppression by the British had a deep impact on the Muslim psyche in the Malabar region. The Mappila Muslims developed an aversion to everything connected with British rule. English language was dubbed as the language of devil and western education was considered a passport to hell. After the rebellion, government took the matter of Muslim education quite seriously and appointed a Committee in July 1922. The Committee recommended (a) compulsory elementary education for Mappilas especially in taluks affected by the Mappila rebellion, (b) appointment of properly qualified Arabic teachers to give religious instruction to Mappila students. As a result of these measures, the number of Mappila schools increased from 557 in 1921-22 to 1598 in 1931-32. The total student strength increased from 39,096 to 1,14,604 (Ali 1990:104-106). Despite all these measures, compared to Travancore and Cochin, the educational backwardness of Malabar continued. Salim and Nair (2002) observed:

“ Malabar trailed due to a variety of factors such as the mutual animosity between the British and the Muslims, reluctance on the part of the Muslims to attend schools opened for Hindus, the existence of a tyrannous system of land ownership and a tenancy system under which the tenants were being progressively impoverished, the tardy growth of the economic sectors and the British policy of indifference in the development of primary education” (p.147).

### **Progress in Muslim Education after the formation of Kerala**

Muslims, especially Mappila Muslims of Malabar were much backward than the other two communities at the time of formation of Kerala November 1, 1956 by combining the state of Travancore-Cochin with Malabar which was part of Madras state. But Muslims in general and Malabar Muslims in particular soon caught up with them in the subsequently years. A combination of factors worked to the advantage of Muslims. They are the emergence of Indian Union Muslim League as a political force, social reform movements, Muslim Education Society (MES) and Gulf remittance. We may outline each of these factors in some detail.

#### **1. Indian Union Muslim League (IUML)**

After partition of the country, All India Muslim League was disbanded. IUML emerged as a political party representing the Muslim community in Kerala. IUML has marginal presence in Tamil Nadu also. IUML has been an important constituent of the two coalition fronts, Left Democratic Front (LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF) which have been alternating since 1980. As table-3 shows, IUML handled the Education portfolio in most of the coalition governments since 1967.

**Table 3: Muslim ministers who held Education portfolio in different ministries in Kerala**

<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Period of holding Education portfolio</b>	<b>Muslim minister holding the Education portfolio</b>	<b>Party to which the Muslim Minister belongs</b>
Patton Thanu Pillai Ministry	February 1960 to September 1962	P.P Ummar Koya	Indian National Congress
Second E.M.S Ministry	March 1967 to October 1969	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
First Achutha Menon Ministry	November 1969 to August 1970	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
Second Achutha Menon Ministry	October 1970 to March 1973	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
First Karunakaran Ministry	March 1977 to April 1977	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
First Antony Ministry	April 1977 to December 1977 October 4, 1978 to October 27, 1978	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
P.K Vasudevan Nair Ministry	October 29, 1978 to October 1979	C.H Muhammed Koya	IUML
Second Antony Ministry	March 1995 to May 1996	E.T Muhammed Basheer	IUML
Third Antony Ministry	May 2001 to August 2004	Nalakathu Soopy	IUML
First Oommen Chandy Ministry	August 2004 to May 2006	E.T Muhammed Basheer	IUML
Second Oommen Chandy Ministry	May 2011 to May 2016	P.K Abdu Rabb	IUML

IUML holding the educational portfolio for so many years played a major role in spreading literacy among Muslims in general and Mappila Muslims of Malabar in particular. In 1968 Calicut University was established in Malabar. Shri. C.H Muhammed Koya held the Education portfolio during this period.

One of the major contributions of IUML to the Muslim community is in the education sector. Holding of Education portfolio for a long time helped the starting of both government and aided educational intuitions<sup>3</sup>. Table-4 shows the religion-wise distribution of aided educational institutions in Kerala.

**Table 4: Region- wise and community-wise ownership of aided educational institutions**

	Malabar		Travancore-Cochin		Kerala	
	Aided schools (No.)	Aided colleges# (No.)	Aided schools (No.)	Aided colleges (No.)	Aided schools (No.)	Aided colleges (No.)
Christians	387(5.42)	11(5.39)	2209(31.84)	84(41.17)	2596(36.36)	95(46.57)
Muslims	1174(16.44)	29(14.22)	210(2.94)	9(4.41)	1384(19.38)	38(18.63)
Hindus	1866(26.13)	15(7.35)	1091(15.28)	48(23.53)	2957(41.41)	63(30.88)
Others@	77(1.08)	7(3.43)	126(1.76)	1(0.49)	203(2.84)	8(3.92)
Total	3504(49.08)	62(30.39)	3636(50.92)	142(69.61)	7140(100.00)	204(100.00)

# Aided colleges include arts and science, engineering, polytechnic and homeo and ayurveda colleges. @ 'Others' include secular institutions run by co-operatives and trusts whose members are drawn from all communities.

Figures in the bracket are percentages to total aided schools and aided colleges in Kerala.

Source: 1.Data relating to aided schools have been obtained through RTI request to Director of General Education, Government of Kerala. 2. Data relating to aided colleges have been retrieved from the official website of Higher Education Department on 24-07-2019.

Table-4 shows that though lower than their share in population, Muslims have strong presence both in general education and higher education sectors of Kerala.

## 2.Social reform movements

Literacy in Malabar increased at a more rapid rate than in Travancore-Cochin especially since 1970s. One major factor behind this is the decisive shift in the attitude of Muslim community in Malabar towards education. Various Muslim reform movements were instrumental in bringing about this change. The prominent leaders of this movement were Sayyid Sanaulla Makti Thangal, Shaik Muhammed Hamadani Thangal, Calilakatt Kunhammed Haji and K. M Moulavi. The Islahi Movement led by K. M Moulavi made a significant contribution in this regard. In 1922, Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham was launched under the leadership of prominent Muslim leaders. Himayatul Islam Sabha, J.D.T Islam Sabha, Maunath-UI-Islam Sabha are some of the prominent participants of the reform movement(Ali, 1990). Farook College in Ferok was started as a boy's college in 1948. It began admitting girls in 1959.

## 3.Muslim Educational Society

The starting of Muslim Educational Society (MES) in 1964 by a group of young Muslim professionals, especially doctors can be considered a land mark in the educational progress of Muslims in Kerala. Over the years, MES expanded its activities by starting educational institutions in the aided and unaided sectors. Table-5 presents a picture MES presence in the education sector of Kerala.



**Table 5: Educational Institutions of Muslim Educational Society**

<b>Area/ discipline</b>	<b>No. of intuitions</b>
Engineering colleges	5
Medical, dental and Nursing	4
Management	1
Training	2
Arts and Science colleges	
1. Aided	7
2. Self-financed	21
3. Self- Financed Women’s colleges	7
CBSE Schools	36
ICSE Schools	1
Higher Secondary Schools	
1. Aided	6
2. Unaided	6
3. Tamil Nadu State Syllabus	1
Lower Primary and Upper Primary schools	
1. Aided	3
2. Unaided English Medium	20
Other institutions*	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>

\*includes teachers training centres, special schools, hostels, orphanages, cultural complexes

Source: www.meserala.com

#### **4.Gulf remittances**

The opportunities to migrate to Gulf countries can be considered as a game changer in the standard of living of the Muslims and their subsequent progress in modern education. From mid 1970s, Keralites started to migrate to Middle East countries. Though all communities could migrate, the Muslims had an advantage when it came to the work opportunities within the Arab households like house maid, cook, chauffer, gardener, cleaner etc. Muslims with elementary education could get employed in these sorts of occupations in thousands. It is as if their status as less educated and poor helped rather than hindered them in this respect. Mathew and Nair(1978) observed:

“Large-scale emigration of persons with little or low educational qualifications and training became again possible only by the latter half of the sixties when the Persian Gulf region began, on a massive scale, to convert its oil prosperity into construction activities. The Muslims of Kerala provided the major source of supply of labour, in the beginning, since they had for a variety of historical and religious reasons easy access to this region. Later, other communities also joined the fray and the exodus of Keratites to this region is still growing”(p.1141).

The studies undertaken on the impact of migration have underlined this aspect (see for example Prakash 1978; and Nair 1989).

The studies undertaken by the Research Unit on International Migration of the Centre for Development Studies(CDSMRU) is the most authentic source of information on migration related matters. CDSMRU has been undertaking large multi-stage random sample surveys following more or less uniform methodology since 1998. The findings of three such surveys relating to migration and remittances are presented in table-6.

**Table 6: Emigration and Remittances by Religion 1998-2014**

(Per cent)

Religion	Emigrants			Remittances		
	1998	2008	2014	1998	2008	2014
Hindus	29.5	37.7	36.3	28.7	38.1	39.6
Christians	19.9	21.2	22.4	23.4	18.0	24.2
Muslims	50.7	41.1	41.3	47.9	43.9	36.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's computation using the data from Zacharia and Rajan(2016)

Table-6 shows that Muslims who form 26.65% of Kerala population according to 2011 Census has disproportionately high share in emigration and remittances. However, the impact of remittances on Muslim education is felt only in the last two decades. One reason could be that earnings of initial years of migration are spent on repaying the debt and acquiring assets like houses and household articles. Perhaps the community members could think about investing in education of the children only after achieving a threshold of financial security. This is evident from the fact that when Kerala opened the education sector for private investment in 2000, Muslim community took advantage of it and came forward to start educational institutions in various disciplines. This can be taken as an indicator of the impact of remittances in the education sector. Table-7 shows the Muslim presence in the self-financing education sector in Kerala.

**Table 7 : Muslim Presence in the self-financing education sector of Kerala**

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Total number of institutions in the self-financing sector</b>	<b>Institutions owned by Muslims</b>	<b>Muslim institutions as a percentage to total number of institutions</b>
Arts and Science	391	78	19.95
Management	45	5	11.11
Law	19	4	21.05
Training	130	28	21.54
Engineering	131	20	15.27
Modern medicine	23	4	17.39
Ayurveda	14	1	7.14
Nursing	117	9	7.69
Dental	20	5	25.00
Total	890	154	17.30

Source: Compiled by the author based on the information furnished in the websites of Universities in Kerala.

Note: From the list of self-financing institutions in each discipline, the institutions bearing Muslim names are classified as Muslim institution. Self-financing institutions owned by Muslims but bearing secular names will not come under this classification.

Table-7 shows that though lower than their share in population of the state, the Muslim have a strong presence in the self-financing sector.

### **The emerging challenges facing education of young Muslims in Kerala**

We have seen that unlike the scenario obtaining in most Indian states, Muslim representation in higher education in Kerala is fairly high. This has been made possible by a host of factors. However, this doesn't mean that in matters of education, the Muslims do not face any challenge in the present day Kerala. There is growing evidence that at least a small section of the young educated Muslims gets swayed by extremist/fundamentalist tendencies. They tend to interpret Islamic texts disregarding the context of the texts. Kadakkal(2016) observed:

“ The natural outcome of this text fetishism, with no respect for the text's context could be seen in the Salafism of Kerala”.

Renowned litterateur Professor M.N Karasseri noted<sup>4</sup>:

“ The Muslim youth today are looking for idealism and adventure. They are being misguided by the proponents of Maududism that exposes a do-or-die battle for ensuring *hukumathe ilahi*(the rule of Allah)”

Progressive Muslim writer Prof. Hameed Chennamangaloor observed<sup>5</sup>:

“ The circumstances are ideal for fanatics to convince their community members here that the problems their community faces in Iraq or Afghanistan are their own problems. The fact is that the problems of even the Muslims in Kerala are quite different from their community members in northern states. Some of these groups have more funds than even mainline political parties like the congress or the CPM and can hire any number of hands”

The extremist/fundamentalist tendencies of this small section of educated Muslims have been instrumental in a few incidents which attracted considerable media attention. Four of such incidents are outlined below.

### **1. Love Jihad**

Love jihad, also known as ‘Romeo Jihad’, is an alleged activity under which young Muslim boys and men reportedly target young girls belonging to non-Muslim communities for conversion to Islam by feigning love. This issue attracted considerable media attention in Kerala. Kerala High Court directed Kerala police to enquire into the matter. The enquiry revealed that the allegation was baseless<sup>6</sup>. The Cyber cell of the police registered a case against the operations of the website [www.hindujagruti.org](http://www.hindujagruti.org) and initiated legal proceedings against it for spreading religious hatred and false propaganda. The issue however is far from settled. Recently, the Vice-Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities has raised the issue of alleged ‘love jihad’ and its supposed connection to terror activities (Hindu 2019: 10).

### **2. Assault on Professor T.J Joseph**

On 4 July 2010, Professor T.J Joseph, professor of Malayalam in Newman College Thodupuzha, a Christian Minority Institution had his hand cut off at the wrist as punishment on allegation of blasphemy by people belonging to Popular Front of India, a confederation of allegedly radical, fanatic, Muslim fundamentalist and extremist organisations<sup>7</sup>. The incident occurred in an area where Christians are a majority. Though it did not lead to a communal conflagration due to the mature handling of the issue by the Catholic Church which owns the institution, it attracted considerable media attention.

### **3. Kerala Muslim youth joining Islamic State(IS)**

The news of Muslim youth joining Islamic State generated considerable debate and discussion in print and electronic media across Kerala. The alarming aspect of this development was that those reported to have joined IS are well educated and hailed from financially sound families. It was reported that 21 Muslims-twelve men, six women and three children-went missing from Kerala. Of the 21, one was a doctor, two were engineers and one was a management graduate<sup>8</sup>. Reports suggest that nearly 100 young Muslims joined IS of which 38 lost their life fighting<sup>9</sup>.

#### **4. Banning veil in MES educational Institutions**

Young Muslim women across the state can be seen in public spaces with their faces covered. This tendency is also influenced by the extremism/fanaticism. Concerned with this, the General Secretary of MES issued an order banning Muslim girl students from appearing in MES educational institutions covering face. To quote the order<sup>10</sup>:

“MES which aims at the social and cultural progress of the Muslim community insists that students, even while maintaining high standards in curricular and extra-curricular activities, do follow a certain decorum in dress code too. Under these circumstances, dresses that are unacceptable to mainstream society-whether they are modern or religious-cannot be promoted.”

Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema and Samastha Kerala Sunni Students Federation opposed the order of MES.

The young generation of Muslims lives in the multi-religious, highly competitive and media saturated society of Kerala. The incidents described above may have impacted on the young Muslims pursuing higher education and entering the job market in various ways. They may face discrimination in educational institutions and job market. This may lead to a tendency in young Muslims to be more inward looking in their behavior. This may also influence their decisions relating to choice of educational institution, place of stay during education and after education. What follows is an attempt to obtain the feedback of a sample of young Muslims and Muslim elders on these issues.

#### **Gathering the feedback: The methodology**

As per the agreement arrived at between the author and Vikas Anvesh Foundation, the sponsor of this study, discussions were to be held with three different segments of the Muslim community on the factors underlying under representation of Muslims in higher education. The segments identified were 1.students; 2.college alumni and professionals; and 3. educationalists, civil society experts, activists and learned Muslims. A list of broad points to be discussed with these segments was given. The focus of the discussion points was under representation of Muslims in higher education and factors contributing to it. Since the Kerala picture is somewhat different from the picture obtaining in most Indian states, it was agreed upon to confine the discussions with the last two segments. Some modifications were incorporated in the discussion points to include the emerging challenges that the young Muslims face while pursuing higher education and career. Specifically, the issue of educated young Muslims joining Islamic State campaign in Syria and the decision of MES to ban veil in the campuses was included.

it was proposed to hold discussions with 25-30 alumni/professionals and 10-15 intellectuals, educationalists and Muslim elders. Considering the cost and time implications, it was decided to adopt convenience sampling method and accordingly all samples were selected from Thiruvananthapuram. At the same time, care has been taken to the extent possible to select discussants from different family and occupational background. Since majority of the Muslims of Kerala belonged to the Malabar region, efforts have been made to select discussants presently residing in Thiruvananthapuram but hailing from Malabar.

Though discussions were actually held with 28 alumni/ professionals and 16 educationalists/ Muslim elders, only 26 from the former and 13 from the latter are finally included in the study as discussions with some were not satisfactory. Of the 26 alumni/ professionals, 17 are males and 9 are females. The intellectuals/Muslim elders composed of males only. The mean age of the alumni/professionals was 27 and that of intellectuals/Muslim elders was 48.

## Findings

Family, educational and occupational background of the discussants are presented in table-8.

**Table 8: Family, educational and occupational background of discussants**

Particulars	Alumni/Professionals		Intellectuals/Muslim elders etc.	
	No.	% to total no. of discussants	No.	% to total no. of discussants
<u>Family background</u>				
a. Government service	5	19.23	1	7.69
b. Private sector service	4	15.39	3	23.08
c. Expatriate	8	30.77	1	7.69
d. Agriculture	5	19.23	5	38.46
e. Small business/trade	4	15.39	3	23.08
<u>Educational background</u>				
a. Graduate	9	34.62	4	30.77
b. Engineering graduate	4	15.39	Nil	--
c. Post-graduate	6	23.08	3	23.08
d. Ph. D	1	3.85	5	38.46
e. others#	6	23.07	1	7.69
<u>Occupational background</u>				
a. Pursuing higher studies	4	15.39	--	--
b. Seeking job	8	30.77	--	--
c. Government service	2	7.69	--	--
d. Private sector	9	34.62	--	--
e. Self-employed	3	11.54	--	--
f. University/College faculty	--	--	5	38.46
g. Journalist	--	--	2	15.39
h. Moulavi	--	--	1	7.69
i. Legislator	--	--	1	7.69
j. Writer	--	--	2	15.39
K. Social and political activist	--	--	2	15.39

# include engineering and pharmacy diploma, qualification in Arabic

Table-8 shows that the discussants are drawn from a wide spectrum of family, educational and occupational background.

Since we have presented hard data and evidences on the historical and socio-economic factors contributing to the comparatively better enrollment rate of Muslims in Kerala, the opinion of the discussants on these aspects was not sought during the discussion. This is to avoid highly subjective opinions on issues on which firm data and evidences are available and the same have been presented in this paper. The issues connected with 'Madrassa education' and 'taking educational loan' are not strictly relevant in the context of Kerala since there does not exist any evidence to show that these two issues have led to poor enrolment rate in Kerala. The focus of the discussions was on the emerging challenges that the young Muslims face while pursuing higher education and career. Major perceptions/opinions emerging from the discussions with civil society experts, activists and learned Muslims are presented in table-9.

**Table 9: Major perceptions/opinions emerging from the discussions with civil society experts, activists and learned Muslims**

<b>Point of discussion</b>	<b>No. of discussants</b>	<b>% to total no. of discussants</b>
1.Perception of being discriminated by fellow students/faculty/management		
a. No discrimination	11	84.62
b. Some discrimination may be there if one tries to keep up Muslim identity	2	15.39
2.Impact of Muslim youth joining IS on young Muslim pursuing higher education and career		
a. Puts pressure on Muslim youth to appear more 'secular'	8	61.54
b. Muslim youth can be viewed with suspicion by other communities	5	38.46
3.Interventions to wean away young Muslims from the influence of extremist ideas/extremist groups		
a. Not a serious issue as only miniscule minority has joined such groups	5	38.46
b. The religious leaders should teach the real meaning of Islamic teachings	2	15.39
c. Muslim youth should be encouraged to be part of the larger society rather than follow the internet materials	5	38.46
4.Tendency of young Muslims to prefer Muslim institutions for higher education		
a. No such tendency is visible now	4	30.77
b. Such a tendency may emerge	5	38.46
c. Other things being equal a Muslim institution will be preferred	4	30.77
5.Banning of Muslims students from wearing face cover by Muslim Educational Society		
a. Cannot be said it is a wrong decision	6	46.15
b. Banning should have been avoided	4	30.77
c. Banning by MES will make institutions run by other communities to introduce such restrictions	3	23.08
6.Perception about presence of Islamophobia in Kerala society		
a. Not perceived	9	69.23
b. Mild form slowly emerging	4	30.77

It may be noted that the perception/opinion of civil society experts, activists and learned Muslims on most of the discussion points is balanced. Major perceptions/opinions emerging from the discussions with college alumni and professions are presented in table-10.



**Table 10: Major perceptions/opinions emerging from the discussions with college alumni/ and professionals**

<b>Point of discussion</b>	<b>No. of discussants</b>	<b>% to total no. of discussants</b>
1.Perception about being discriminated by fellow students/faculty/management		
a. No discrimination	19	73.08
b. Mild discrimination	5	19.23
c. One can be isolated if one tries to keep up Muslim identity	2	7.69
2.Impact of Muslim youth joining IS on young Muslims pursuing higher education and career		
a. No impact	17	65.39
b. Attempt to keep a Muslim identity will be misunderstood	5	19.23
c. Puts pressure to appear more secular	4	15.39
3. Interventions to wean away young Muslim from extremist groups and extremist ideas		
a. The real meaning of Islamic should be taught in Madrasas and Mosques	18	69.23
c. Muslim youth should avoid moving with Muslims only in campus and public spaces	6	23.08
d. Young Muslims should be discouraged from accessing websites and internet resources spreading extremism	2	7.69
4.Tendency of young Muslims to prefer Muslim institutions for higher education		
a. No such tendency	18	69.23
b. Other things being equal a Muslim institution will be preferred	6	23.08
d. Such a tendency is slowly emerging	2	7.69
5. Banning of Muslims students from wearing face cover by Muslim Educational Society		
e. Right decision	18	69.23
f. Banning should have been avoided	8	30.77

It may be noted that the perceptions/opinions of the college alumni/professionals is not as measured as that of civil society experts and activists for obvious reasons.

## **Observations/comments**

Some of the observations/comments made by the individual discussants provided interesting insights into the predicament of young Muslims pursuing higher education or searching job in Kerala. The young Muslim girls are caught between the pressure of the community to follow the dress code and the need of appearing 'secular/modern' in the emerging job market. One discussant observed:

“ If we totally ignore the diktats of the community, we may be more acceptable in the job market. But when it comes to marriage, this can create problems. Therefore one has to keep a delicate balance between these two considerations.”

Though Kerala is relatively free from Islamophobia, the discussions with college alumni/professionals reveal the presence of traces of Islamophobia. One discussant observed:

“ While travelling in train, I try to mingle with fellow passengers and participate in discussions. The moment I reveal my identity, the atmosphere changes. Some people then stop speaking.”

For most young male Muslims, there is no visible discrimination in the job market. But finding an accommodation even in cosmopolitan cities like Kochi can be problematic at times. One discussant observed:

“ The moment we reveal our identity, the attitude of the landlords change. They find one excuse or the other and try to avoid us. There is a definite preference in favour of non-Muslims”.

While much need not be read from these personal observations, they do suggest that young Muslims face various problems in day to day life. And that does not auger well with the so called secular and modern image of Kerala.

## **Summary and conclusions**

This study is undertaken in the back drop of gross under representation of Muslims in higher education at the all India level. But Kerala presents a somewhat different picture. The study has gone into the historical and socio-economic factors underlying the comparatively better representation of Muslims in higher education in Kerala. Historically, the Mappila Muslims of Malabar who forms 72% of Muslims in Kerala were educationally much backward than their counterparts in Travancore and Cochin. While Malabar was part of the Madras Province of British India, Travancore and Cochin were princely states.

The Mappila Muslims of Malabar always had a strained relationship with the British. This together with conservative attitude resulted in extreme backwardness of Muslims in modern education. After independence, Malabar became part of unified Kerala following re-organisation of states on linguistic lines. Malabar Muslims caught up very fast with other communities in the post- independence period. The major contributing factors are the Indian Union Muslim League's holding Education portfolio for quite a long time, social reform movements, Muslim Educational Society and Gulf remittances. Of the four

factors, the last one namely Gulf remittances has been a game changer as far as Muslim education is concerned. Kerala opened up higher education sector for private investment in 2000. Armed with disposable surpluses earned from the Gulf countries, Muslims entered the higher education sector in a big way by opening several self-financing institutions.

Though Kerala Muslims could overcome the educational backwardness to a great extent, education of young Muslims is confronted by new challenges. The tendency of young and educated Muslims to get swayed by extremist/fundamentalist ideas is a cause of concern. How the community negotiates with these challenges and forges ahead is crucial for the future of Muslim education in Kerala.

## Notes

1. It has been pointed out that " illiteracy and infant mortality rates in Malabar, which had been under direct British control as part of the Madras Presidency were significantly higher than those in princely states of Travancore and Cochin"(Singh 2010:286).

2. For a documented history of the rebellion, see Hitchcock(1925) and Tottenham(1922). The Mappila rebellion has been subjected to considerable academic research. Some of the major contributions are Dale(1980), Panikkar(1992) and Miller(1976).

3. The concept of aided educational institutions is a unique feature of Kerala. In the early years of Kerala's formation, the fiscal situation of was not sound enough to invest in educational infrastructure. Therefore government encouraged individuals and communities to open educational institutions. To begin with government was extending grants to these institutions to pay salary to teaching and non-teaching grants and to maintain the infrastructure. This system involved several exploitative practices. The organisations of teachers exerted pressure on the government to pay salary directly and frame rules to ensure job security. Government subsequently framed rules wherein government agreed to pay salary and allowances to teachers appointed by the managements on par with teachers in government run institutions. In the case of colleges, direct payment was introduced from 1972.

4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault\\_on\\_T.\\_J.\\_Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault_on_T._J._Joseph), viewed on 27-8-2019.

5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault\\_on\\_T.\\_J.\\_Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault_on_T._J._Joseph), viewed on 27-08-2019.

6. "Kerala police probe cracks love jihad myth",  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20131211064437/http://gulftoday.ae/portal/9af0ebf3-d10f-4592-bd7e-9a0dc0d37bc6.aspx>, viewed on 13-8-2019 .

7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault\\_on\\_T.\\_J.\\_Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assault_on_T._J._Joseph), viewed on 27-08-2019.

8. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Mystery-of-the-missing-twenty-one/article14504798.ece> viewed on 22-09-1019

9. " About 100 people from Kerala joined ISIS over the years: Police", [indiatoday.in/india/story/about-100-keralites-suspected-to-have-joined-isis-police-1084495-2017-11-11](http://indiatoday.in/india/story/about-100-keralites-suspected-to-have-joined-isis-police-1084495-2017-11-11), viewed on 21-8-2019.

10. "Kerala Muslim educational body bans niqab in its 150 institutes",  
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