



PUBLIC LECTURE

FEAR OF NUMBERS

**DEMOGRAPHIC ANXIETIES AND
SYRIAN CHRISTIAN RESPONSES IN KERALA**

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VENUE: **Harmony Hall**, MASCOT HOTEL, **Thiruvananthapuram**

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ABSTRACT

Given the growing anxiety among the Syrian Christians of Kerala about their declining proportion in the population of the region, this presentation proposes a look at the demographic transition of the community from the early 20th century to the present day. It will explore three specific historic cum demographic contexts in modern times and the heterogeneous responses that the Syrian Christian community offered to those situations of numerical angst. It will show that contestations driven by population numbers and proportions are historically contingent and could be used for diverse and conflicting purposes – it could be used to engender a majoritarian fear, it could be used as a tool in the hands of a state harbouring its developmentalist anxieties and also for fanning existentialist fears by certain communities. The presentation will suggest that the ongoing Syrian Christian fear of becoming a minor within the cohort of minorities also hints at an internal crisis and perhaps a loss of moral weight it possessed earlier in a multi-religious society and its shared cultural life, as much as the majoritarian politics that engulfs the minorities today.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Dr. V. J. Varghese teaches at the Department of History in the School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad. He works on the transformation of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala, under the weight of modernity through the routes of migrations, land reclamation and agrarian expansion. He looks at the apparently conflicting orientations - local and the imperial/global, religious and the secular, traditional and the modern & pre-political and political- involved in the production of modern subjectivities in the erstwhile colonies of the global South. He has co-authored *Dreaming Mobility and Buying Vulnerability: Overseas Recruitment Practices in India* (Routledge) and co-edited *Anjuru Varshathe Keralam: Chila Arivadayalanga* in Malayalam (Tapasam/SPCS), *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World* (Cambridge University Press). He was Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow at the University of Edinburgh (2018); Research Excellence Visiting Fellow at CEU, Budapest (2017-18); Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ARI, National University of Singapore (2014) and an ESRC Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex (2010-11).

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