ABSTRACT

In India, despite the legislation forbidding child marriage since 1929 and the adoption of the much more progressive Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006, the practice of early marriage still exists. Even though there are many initiatives to prevent child marriage, a substantial portion i.e. every third adolescent girl in the age group of 15-19 is married. The practice of marrying girls at a very tender age continues to be accepted – as a social norm – by a large section of the society. According to the report of UNICEF (2010) around 40% of the world’s child marriages take place in India, and is widely practiced in almost all states. Even in Kerala, which is known to be a ‘model of development’ to the other states, girls are married off at a very young age especially among the rural poor Muslims of the Malabar region. The rapid increase in the number of early marriages and divorces, over the past few years are the two major threats to the lives and prospects of thousands of poor Muslim girls in Malabar. Earlier research works prove that early marriage deprives girls of their adolescence and negatively affects the overall development. The practice is often depicted as a form of gender based violence. The present study is an attempt to find out the causes and consequences of early marriage upon the lives of Muslim women.

The focus is on 500 abandoned Muslim wives from three districts in Malabar region – Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur – who were married before the age of 18. Age at marriage and present age are the two background characteristics used for the bi-variate analysis of the data. The economic theory of Karl Marx, Vandana Shiva’s views on women’s oppression, the culture of violence theory of Wolfgang and Ferracuti, the objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts and the social exchange theory of Levinger are the theoretical framework of the study. The analysis underscores that it is the women belonging to low socio-economic status who are at the risks of early marriage and early abandonment. The findings of the study reveal that both early marriage and early abandonment are significantly influenced by the economic and cultural factors.

Key words: Early marriage, Early abandonment