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3.1 Theoretical Framework

The Marxian theory of economic determinism postulates that economic relationships provide the foundation on which all other political and social arrangements are built. Marx (1864) saw all human relations as stemming ultimately from the economic system. According to him, the position of women in society is at least partially determined by their place in the family unit which usually consists of the husband, the wife, and the children and is based on property relationships. In *The German Ideology* a collaborative work with Engels, Marx (1846) accords that it is in the family that social divisions arise and the history of the family shows the accumulation of wealth and the division of labour which gradually transforms the simple relations of the family group into the complex relations of bourgeois society. There exists a situation in which females are placed in circumstances in which they occupy an inferior position in society and this position is purely based on economic conditions.

Engels (1884) devoted more extensive attention to issues relating to sex, gender, and the family in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. According to him, family became the economic unit and men, the owners of property. Thus for Engels the subordination and the exploitation of women were derived entirely from the relations of
production under patriarchy. In this book the historical process of the
development of patriarchy and due transformation of the status of women
from that of free and equal productive members of society to one of
subordinate and dependent wives and wards is very well portrayed. The
increase in wealth gave more status to the man in the family and provided
the stimulus to overthrow the traditional order of matrilineal inheritance
to establish the institution of patriline. This transference of power
(dominance) within the framework of the family division of labour was a
‘revolution’ – ‘one of the most decisive ever experienced by mankind’. Engels elaborates on the theme of patriarchal oppression: "The overthrow
of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man
took command in the home also. The woman was ‘degraded’, in effect
enslaved, reduced to servitude and turned largely into ‘a mere instrument
for breeding children. This lowered the position of women. She became
the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children"
(p 120). For Engels male dominance over women is simply a
configuration of the class-division between the propertied man and the
propertyless woman. From this point of view, the social subordination of
women is, thus, a function of economic necessity and is, as such, an
inescapable feature of the social relations of production (the class
structure).
The relationship between patriarchy, religion, culture and women’s oppression has been a subject of interest for many Marxist feminists. Feminist theorists showed that in most societies patriarchal ideologies contain a built-in, gender based hierarchy, which gives social institutions like the family or religious authorities a considerable authority over women’s labour as well as their sexuality. They argue that with the evolution of private property, men began to exploit women for free labour. Marriage and family served men to control and exploit women enormously. Famous radical feminist theorist Millet (1970) has attempted to explain women’s oppression by making a theory of patriarchy.

The role of culture in the oppression of women is better explained by the famous Indian feminist Shiva (1993). In her observation about the oppression of women Vandana Shiva argues that, culture has significant impact upon male domination over women. She says that the economy-culture dualism is the real cause of women’s oppression. Exploitation of women is more frequent in societies that preserve cultural elements and tradition that justifies women’s oppression. In male dominating societies patriarchal thinking shapes the values of the culture. In patriarchal cultures, women are positioned in a subordinate place and are taught to accept male violence as a normal part of their lives.

The culture of violence theory postulated by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) looks at violence based on the larger societal norms and structure.
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It views violence under this social structure in two perspectives: the cultural approval of violence and the subculture of violence. The cultural approval of violence perspective attributes violence in the home to the level of acceptance of violence in the larger society. Thus if violence is an accepted means of conflict resolution, goal attainment, or status quo maintenance, it is more likely to play into family interactions. Many acts of violence are accepted and in many ways encouraged. Violence between family members is therefore a reflection of the broader culture. The subculture of violence perspective rests on the tenet that cultural norms vary within society and that some subcultures value the use of violence. Wolfgang and Ferracuti explained this perspective as within a large pluralistic society; certain subcultures develop norms and values that stress and justify the use of physical force to a higher level than acceptable in the predominant larger culture. The theory shows that if violence is accepted as normal behaviour within any specific group of people, then it is likely that more members of the group will participate in the behaviour, especially if the behaviour is rewarded in some way.

The objectification theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posits that sexual objectification is a form of gender oppression that occurs with both “endless variety and monotonous similarity”. In sexual objectification a female is treated as a body (or a collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to or pleasure of (or consumption by)
Objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. The cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring which in turn can increase women’s opportunities for shame and anxiety and diminish awareness of internal bodily states.

The culmination of sexual violence against a wife is abandonment or divorce. The social exchange theory of marital cohesion by Levinger (1965) is one of the main sociological theories used for explaining separation and divorce. The theory argues that the strength of a marital relationship is based on three factors: the attraction to the current marriage, barriers to leaving that marriage, and the attractiveness of marital alternatives. The stability of a marital relationship is positively related to the net rewards of the current relationship (rewards minus costs), the strength of barriers to exiting the marriage, and inversely associated with the relative attractiveness of alternatives to the marriage. The attractions to the current marriage relate to the net benefits that one receives from being in that relationship, such as companionship, emotional support, goods, and status. Rewards may be material (e.g., income and home ownership), symbolic (e.g., educational or occupational status), or affectional (e.g., companionship and sexual enjoyment). The
second main factor in the exchange perspective on marital cohesion is the strength of barriers that restrict the divorce or abandonment. According to Levinger, barriers are psychological and moral restraining forces to dissolution that function to prevent or delay divorce even when attraction to the current relationship is low or alternatives to the relationship exist. The final component of Levinger’s theory is the relative attractiveness of alternatives to the marital relationship. When deciding whether to stay in a marriage, Levinger argues that individuals compare the rewards and attractions of their current relationship to the attractiveness of their perceived alternatives. If the net attractiveness of alternatives is higher than the rewards associated with their current relationship, and barriers are low, they may decide to dissolve the marriage. Individuals may consider the attractiveness of other potential mates, but also the attractiveness of no partner at all. Thus, relationships with individuals other than one’s spouse, such as those involving friends, colleagues, and relatives, may be important when weighing the attractiveness of alternatives. Individuals who are unsatisfied in their current relationship and perceive few barriers may still stay in their marriage if they do not feel that potential alternatives are more desirable than their current marriage. In addition, individuals are more likely to divorce when more alternatives exist.
These theories emphasizing the relationship between women’s oppression, violence against them and economic as well as social and cultural aspects form the theoretical framework for the present study. The institutional approach is applied here to look into the exploitation of women within the institution of marriage and family among the Muslim community in the Malabar region of Kerala and how the institution of early marriage evoked by the patriarchy exists as an extreme form of gender violence.

3.2 Statement of the Problem

Kerala has been recognized as one of the most progressive states of the country, having high literacy rate and median age at marriage for women; even then early marriage continues to be the reality for many girls. Even though it is already known that in Kerala, the practice of early marriage is widespread among the poor Muslim girls in rural areas, the latest survey report of the Integrated Child Development Scheme conducted in Malappuram district in 2013 brings to light the shocking fact that the rate of early marriage is alarmingly high in the district. Early marriage is recognized to be a serious social problem as it has wide implications in the well-being of individuals, families, and the society as a whole.

Early marriage is significantly associated with a number of negative social as well as physical outcomes for a young woman and her children. Studies have shown that on an average, girls who marry young attain
lower schooling levels, have lower social status in their husbands’ families, less reproductive control and suffer higher rates of maternal mortality and domestic violence. While the practice itself is essentially evil, it culminates in divorce or desertion of women among the Muslim community. In Malabar Muslim culture, polygyny and talaq are often seen as religious customs and they have certain impact upon the rate of early marriage and divorce. But no statistical data are available on early marriage as well as on abandonment because such incidents often go unregistered since they are perceived as part of society’s customary practices. Neither the marriages nor the divorces are held legally. Often divorces will be just a talaaq or a simple abandonment. Again, since this is also an accepted pattern of the cultural practices, nobody ever questions it or goes for legal supports.

Early marriage leading to abandonment can be considered as a serious national problem that needs immediate attention. A mass awareness is to be created against this harmful practice. The present study tries to shed light on issues related to early marriage by focusing on the causes and effects of early marriage and the violence that lead to the abandonment of these Muslim wives in Kerala.
3.3 Objectives

i. To find out the socio-economic determinants that promote and reinforce the practice of early marriage of the Muslim girls in Malabar.

ii. To analyse the different dimensions of violence experienced by the victims of early marriage from their husbands.

iii. To find out whether there is any association between early marriage and early abandonment.

iv. To examine the perception of the victims about early marriage.

v. To assess the awareness of the respondents about the exploitation in early marriage.

vi. To identify the factors leading to wife abandonment in early marriage.

vii. To examine the various problems encountered by the abandoned Muslim wives in their present life.

3.4 Hypotheses

1. Young age at marriage is associated with increased risks of sexual violence.

2. Younger women still live in the horror of sexual violence.

3. The younger the age at marriage, the shorter the duration of marriage.
4. Younger women have a negative perception about the practice of early marriage.

5. Young victims recognize that early marriage can lead to early abandonment.

6. Younger women are aware of the exploitation in early marriage.

7. The lower the age at marriage, the higher the problems faced by women in their later life.

3.5 Clarification of the Concepts

**Early marriage**: According to the definition given by United Nations Population Fund, “Early Marriage is any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing”. In this study early marriage is defined as the marriage of girls before the legal age of 18 and who belong to the rural poor Muslim community in Malabar in Kerala.

**Abandonment**: The act of leaving a Muslim woman forever by her husband without the court interference or the personal law.

**Muslim Wife**: A Muslim wife here refers to a woman who belongs to the Malabar Muslim community and married before the age of 18.

**Victims**: A victim here refers to a Muslim woman married before the age of 18 years and abandoned at present.
3.6 Variables

In this study the age of the respondents is particularly relevant because age is an important demographic component that influences the life of an individual. In the present study age has the possible effects on the respondents’ processes of retention and retrieval of the past experiences in their marriage. Age at marriage and present age of the respondents are the two independent variables taken for the present study. These two variables are found to have a significant influence upon the marriage practices as shown in several other research studies. So, here, age is taken as the analytical framework for understanding the interplay between human lives and the social structure.

3.7 Research Design

Analytical cum descriptive research design is used in this study since the present study intends to analyse the causes and consequences of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in the rural areas of Malabar.

3.8 Universe and Sample

The universe of the study consists of Muslim wives in Kerala who were married below the age of 18 and are abandoned at present. The sample of the study comprises 500 abandoned Muslim wives of the age 31 – 45 years who were married before the legal age of 18. No statistical data or record is available regarding the abandoned Muslim wives in the area. So it was only possible to locate them through snow ball sampling.
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The Snow-ball sampling technique is used when the population of interest is very difficult to get hold of, but it is likely that one member of the population of interest will know other members of the population who can be introduced to the researcher. To begin with an arbitrarily chosen initial set of sample in three different districts, the present study tried to contact respondents through anganwadi teachers in their respective areas. The first respondent was asked to suggest another abandoned Muslim wife and the second one was asked to suggest a third one and so on. This process continued till the predetermined sample size was obtained.

Respondents were selected from three Muslim dense districts in Malabar—Malappuram, Kannur and Kozhikode where early marriage is rampant (Census report 2011). Four Panchayats from Malappuram district, where early marriage is highly practised were purposefully selected and from each Panchayat, 50 respondents were drawn. Thus a total of 200 respondents were selected from Malappuram. Similarly, from Kannur and Kozhikode districts three Panchayats were selected and 50 respondents were taken from each Panchayats. Thus 150 respondents from Kannur and another 150 respondents from Kozhikode were selected, thereby making the total size of the sample to 500.

3.9 Pilot Study

Before preparing the research tool, to have some insight into the problem a pilot study was conducted in Malappuram district. In-depth
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discussions were held with some abandoned Muslim wives to get a better idea about them.

3.10 Preparation of the Tool

As a result of the pilot study it was found that most of the respondents are either illiterate or less educated. Therefore an interview schedule was prepared for collecting data from respondents. Pilot study also helped to realize the importance of observation and case study method to bring out the constraints they faced and the violence that haunted them.

3.10.1 Interview Schedule

In the present study structured interview schedule was the primary research tool. The interview schedule included mostly close-ended questions. In the interview schedule, a ‘Scale to measure the Socio-Economic Status in urban and rural communities in India’ developed by S.C. Tiwari, Aditya Kumar and Ambrish Kumar (2005) has also been included to measure the socio-economic status of the respondents. The interview schedule also includes two indices for asserting the perception of the respondents regarding early marriage and their awareness about the exploitation in early marriage.

Using the interview schedule, a free-flowing interview was carried out and data on personal life experiences in various stages of life were elicited. In few cases an in-depth qualitative analysis was carried out and
it is presented as few case studies. It helped to bring out a graphic picture of the life of the victims.

3.11 Pre-Test

After constructing the interview schedule it was subjected to a pre-test. 50 abandoned Muslim wives who were married before the age of 18 were interviewed for the pretesting of the tool. Slight modifications were brought in the tool on the basis of the pre-test.

3.12 Field work and Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. The primary data was collected by using an interview schedule. All the respondents were personally interviewed with the help of an interview schedule by the researcher, visiting each person. The importance of personal interview as a method of collecting research data in a structured way has been highlighted by many sociologists. It gave the researcher a first-hand information about the topic, which is highlighted in the case studies. After an introduction of the topic and the purpose of the study, the interview was conducted. Communicating in local language helped to reduce ambiguity. All technical terms or words used in the interview schedule were explained to the respondents and they were allowed to choose the response they considered appropriate. The respondents’ doubts were cleared; further clarification was provided whenever necessary.
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Usually the interviews lasted for two to three hours depending on the readiness of the respondents to talk freely. Once the rapport was established, they were quite cooperative and happy to introduce other abandoned women who were known to them. It was found that once the initial set of respondents was identified, further identification of respondents was not at all a difficult task using snow-ball sampling technique. Besides the respondents, discussions were carried out with people from various strata including political and religious leaders, professors, school teachers, social workers, anganwadi teachers, and other prominent people in the locality. Nearly two years were taken to complete the field work in three districts in Malabar.

The major problem encountered was to get the acceptance of the respondents and establish a good rapport with the respondents. One of the problems, which affected the initial rapport building, was language. Though they spoke Malayalam, they had different accent and pronunciations that became troublesome while communicating with the respondents. In several cases, the respondents were accompanied by elders in their family at the time of the interview. In some cases the parents did not allow the researcher to meet the respondents. Once the parents were convinced, the daughters cooperated with the study. During the interview most of the respondents seemed to be emotionally upset and many times they exhibited symptoms of mental distress like crying spells,
mood swings, cursing themselves etc. As a result, each interview took an average of about three hours. The secondary data was collected from books, journal, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, census reports, internet websites etc.

3.13 Analysis and Interpretation

After the collection of the primary data, it was coded and tabulated. The study opted for an integrated analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data. In order to find out the relationship between different variables the percentage analysis, chi-square test and mean analysis were used wherever possible. The statistical analysis is done with the help of statistical package of social Sciences.

3.14 Scheme of Chapterisation

The whole study comprises eight chapters. The first chapter tries to highlight the prevalence of early marriage in India and Kerala. It also shows a detailed picture of the prevalence of early marriage in Malabar and associates it with gender violence. The second chapter gives an account of the previous studies regarding the problem under study. This chapter describes various elements that are attached to early marriage like social, cultural, economic and political factors. It also gives an idea about various causes and effects of early marriage when it is imposed on younger girls. The third chapter deals with methodology of the study that starts with a theoretical framework of the present study focusing mainly
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on the Marxian and Feminist theories. The theoretical components that emphasize the impact of economic and cultural elements upon women in their marriage are focused. The study tries to find out the interplay of these elements in early marriage which is considered as a form of gender violence. The fourth chapter narrates the personal profile of the respondents. It deals with the socio-economic background of the respondents, which determines, promotes and reinforces the practice of early marriage among the poor Muslim girls in Malabar. The fifth chapter analyses early marriage within a gender-violence perspective. This chapter probes into the different dimensions of marital violence experienced by the victims of early marriage. In chapter six an attempt is made to find the association between early marriage and early abandonment. The perception of the victims about early marriage and their awareness about early marriage as a form of gender violence is dealt with in this chapter. This chapter also analyses the factors that lead to the abandonment, according to the victims of early marriage. The seventh chapter gives an idea about the problems encountered by the abandoned women in their present life. A qualitative analysis of case studies is also provided in this chapter. The eighth chapter brings out the summary and conclusions made in this study along with the suggestions and recommendations for the prevention of these situations and for carrying out further researches in this particular topic.
3.15 Limitations of the Study

Despite the committed effort to gather the data, certain limitations seemed to be inevitable. Inability of the respondents to respond to the questions was the major constraint. Due to the sensitivity of the topic the victims were very reluctant to open up. This resulted in repeated visits. Once the rapport was built, the interviews became a catharsis itself. So more hours than anticipated had to be allotted for each interview. Another limitation of the study was that it uses retrospective data on marital violence. Due to their age, older respondents seems to be subjected to recall bias and it may have affected their response rate. A further limitation was that in many cases other women accompanied the respondents while the interview was in progress. Even though the respondents were allowed to talk, at times they found uneasiness to respond to some questions related to their personal life due to the interference by other family members.

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