Chapter – 4

Determinants of Early Marriage of the Muslim Girls in Malabar

As per the survey results of the Social Welfare Department, Malappuram, early marriage of girls is widely prevalent among the poor Muslims living in the rural parts of Malabar (The Indian Express 20/06/2011). According to Mohammedan law, a minor girl may be given in marriage by her father or guardian (Fatima 2007). In Malabar, early marriages are conducted in accordance with the Islamic law and customs that validates the marriage of minor girls. According to Menon (1997), in Malabar among the poor Muslim communities, the traditional way of life and close adherence to religious values have abetted the exploitation of women. Marriage at a quite young age and subsequent ‘talaq’ are found among the lower class. Social practices like polygyny, and unilateral divorce are considered as the ‘religious’ privileges of men.

Increased rate of early marriages and consequent abandonments among poor Muslim women is a serious violation of their rights as human beings. It is a grave gender issue because mostly girls are affected and devastated by this practice. Generally the social evil is associated with the socio-economic backwardness of the community also. According to Basheer (2003), early marriage is high among the poverty stricken Muslim families in the rural areas of Malabar region. Though wife abandonment
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existed in the past too, it was not considered as a serious issue, because abandoned women were highly supported by the joint family system and they were also entitled to remarriage. With the passage of time due to the disappearance of joint family system women lost their social support. At present many abandoned Muslim women face hurdles for remarriage due to the increased greed for dowry and they remain abandoned forever. As a result the number of abandoned Muslim wives has tremendously increased in Malabar, in recent years.

The complex association between poverty and early marriage has been a major concern of the United Nations Children’s Fund and since 2001 the Organization has been conducting several studies across the world, with an aim to find out suitable strategy to control the practice of early marriage among girl children. It came up with studies that proved that wherever in the world early marriage occurs, girls are from poor families. In Malabar also it is found that early marriage is high among the poor Muslims living in the rural areas. Therefore in this study an attempt is made to find out the socio-economic status of the respondents.

4.1 Profile of the respondents

Media reports (The Times of India 10/02/2002) and analysis indicate that in Malabar, the practice of early marriage of Muslim girls is rampant among the poor communities in rural areas. Just like early marriage, other social practices like dowry, serial marriage and talaq (men’s right to
divorce at will) are very common among them (Kuruvilla 2011). Rapid Household Survey conducted in 1998 shows that among the districts in Malabar, highest rate of early marriage is found in Malappuram district, followed by Kannur and Kozhikode where majority of the population belong to the Muslim community. So the present study is conducted in the selected Panchayats of these three districts. In Malappuram district, four Panchayats (Vettam, Wandoor, Vazhikkadavu and Nilambur) were selected purposefully where early marriage prevails. Similarly three Panchayats were selected from Kannur (Munderi, Muzhapilangad and Peralassery) and three Panchayats from Kozhikode (Kuttichira, Thamarassery and Puthuppady) district. Since early marriage and abandonment are sensitive issues there is no formal source of information about it or the women who are the victims of this practice. Therefore the present study had to rely on snow ball sampling technique for the identification of the ‘hidden population’ of abandoned Muslim women married below the age of 18. Anganwadi teachers are well acquainted with their respective areas and keep a good contact with each household in the area. With their help the Panchayats were identified and from these Panchayats using snowball sampling method the respondents were located.

From the discussions with the experts, social workers, it is found that after abandonment women usually went back to their parental home.
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Most of them were brought back by their guardians and live together with their families. Some of them were helped to have a separate arrangement to live, even though they were completely dependent upon their parents/brothers. Secondary data has shown that early marriage and abandonment are found among the poor Muslim community. So the present study tried to find out the socio-economic background of the respondents. In the present study majority of the respondents after being abandoned, are living with their family of orientation and were interviewed there to find out the socio-economic status of the parental family.

4.1.1 Socio-Economic Background

To find out the socio-economic background of the respondents, the present study adopted a socio-economic status scale developed by Tiwari, Kumar and Kumar (2005) known as ‘the Scale to measure the Socio-Economic Status in urban and rural communities in India’. In the scale, seven indicators named as profiles were used for measuring the socio-economic status of the sample of the present study. The seven profiles used to measure the socio-economic status of the respondents are, (1) the House profile, (2) the Material possession profile, (3) the Educational profile, (4) the Occupational profile, (5) the Economic profile, (6) the Possessed Land/House cost profile and (7) the Social profile. Each profile contained five alternatives and each of them was given even
Determinants of Early Marriage

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weightage ranging from 0 to 10. The total score ranged from 0 to 70. On the basis of the scores, the respondents were categorized into five types of SES categories i.e. Upper Class with a score varying from 70 - 57, Upper – Middle with a score of 56 - 43, Middle Class with a score of 42 - 29, Lower – Middle Class with a score of 28 – 15 and Lower Class with a score of 14 – 0 as suggested in the Scale.

The information collected from the respondents on all seven profiles were scored and added. The final scores for each respondent were calculated and found that it is below 14 for all the 500 respondents. That is, all the respondents of the study belong to the below poverty line group. It is important to note that even though the sample was selected through the snow-ball sampling method, no upper class Muslim woman was included as a respondent. Thus it is proved that early marriage is preferred by the lower class Muslim families in Malabar. Since they live below the poverty line, questions were asked to find out how they survive. More than 85% of the respondents are unemployed and only 14.2% were engaged in menial jobs like housemaids in rich families, casual labourers in small scale industries such as coir workers, prawn peelers, fish cleaners etc. Of the 85.8% jobless women, 43.6 % women were under the care of their father/mother. While 31.4 % women were taken care of by their brothers/elder siblings, or sons, the remaining 10.2 % were depending on
their relatives for the survival. Some of the respondents mentioned that they occasionally receive financial help from rich Muslim families.

4.1.2 Age at Marriage

Age is an important biological factor in marriage. The person who marries should reach both sexual and mental maturity in order to carry out marital functions such as sexual relation and procreation. Partners need a certain level of maturity that will be attained only with the age. A female body should be ready for marriage and childbearing. Recognizing this fact, all countries have set a legal minimum age at which young people can marry. In India the legal age at which a girl can marry is 18 years and the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (amended in 1949 and 1978) was somewhat effective in controlling the incidence of underage marriage of girls in the country. Data from the three National Family Health Surveys (NFHS-1, 2 and 3) shows that the rate of early marriage has declined modestly between 1992 and 2006. The percentage of women between the age of 20-24 years who had been married off before 18 has declined from 54% in NFHS-1 (1992-93) to 47% in NFHS-3 (2005-06). But early marriages are widely practiced in the rural areas of the country indicating low age at marriage of rural women.

The age at marriage of women in Kerala has always been higher than India. Between 1901 and 2001 the age at marriage of Kerala women has increased by 3.7 years. In the years followed, the female age at marriage
on further increase by 1.8 years reached 22.6 years in 2011 (Census Report of India 2011). Though the female age at marriage in Kerala is high, the religious differentials are very large. According to Basheer (2002) the lowest age at marriage is found among the Muslim women in Malabar, where the highest rate of early marriage prevails in the state. All the respondents taken for this study are married below the age of 18 years and abandoned by their husbands at present. Surendran (2001) in his article points out that in Malabar, the poor divorced Muslim women have the survival options of remarriage. Therefore many of the divorced/abandoned women marry again and again for their survival. Sometimes women marry 2-3 times in their life. As the study is about early marriage, it is important to know the age of the respondents at the time of their first marriage. It is seen that among the respondents marriages occurred at different ages below 18. In order to find out how early the marriages took place, respondents were asked about their age at first marriage.
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Abandoned Muslim Wives – Victims of Early Marriage

Table 4.1

Age at the time of first marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is absolutely shocking and irrefutable that 56.8% of the respondents were married by the age of 14. Since they were married at or below the age of 14 explicitly as children, it shows that child marriage still prevails in the study area. In India child marriage was considered as a serious social issue and several social reformers in the first part of the 20th Century like Raja Ram Mohan Roy were concerned about child marriage and raised their voice to eradicate this inhuman practice. As a result child marriage was banned in India by the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929. But here it is evident that child marriage survives among the poor Muslims in Malabar. It also indicates that in spite of the law existing against child marriage, even in this 21st Century, it continues to be a reality for many girls in the literate Kerala.

Respondents mentioned that a girl’s marriage is fixed soon after she reaches puberty, as it is considered that menarche is an indication that the
girl is ready for marriage. Therefore mostly marriage of a girl takes place at around 14-15 years. In the present study the mean age at marriage of the respondents is calculated to be 15.1 years which is quite low for a girl to attain physical as well as psychological maturity for marriage. The average age at marriage of the respondents is far below than the state average female age at marriage which is 22.6 years (Census 2011). It shows that significant differences exist in the age at marriage of girls in Kerala. It supports the view that even though the average age at marriage of women in Kerala has always been higher than the rest of the country, the differentials are very large varying with the socio-economic background of the societies within Kerala as reported from various surveys including the District Fertility Survey, NFHS-1, 2 and 3 (International Institute for Population Sciences 2007; 2008; 2010).

4.1.3 Present Age

One of the objectives of this study is to find out the determinants that promote and reinforce the practice of early marriage among the Muslim girls in Malabar. Giesen (1995), indicates that there can be a highly significant difference between younger and older women’s opinion and attitudes. Age can significantly influence the respondent’s perception regarding early marriage and abandonment. So the present age of the respondents is considered as an important independent variable and age is taken as the analytical framework for the present study. Here, in this
study the sample consists of abandoned Muslim women of different ages varying from 31 to 45 years. They are further classified into three groups; i.e. younger age group (31-35 years), middle age group (36-40 years) and older age group (41-45 years). The proportions of the respondents of different ages are presented in the table given below.

Table 4.2

Present Age of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger (31-35 years)</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle (36-40 years)</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older (41-45 years)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant proportion of the sample consists of respondents aged between 36-40 years while only 20.4 % of the respondents belong to the older cohort. It can be seen that the percentage of the middle aged respondents is more than double of the older abandoned women. Anecdotal data shows that in the olden days also wife abandonment and polygyny were common among the Malabar Muslims. During those days the Muslim women, abandoned by the husbands were supported by the joint family system and were encouraged for remarriage. So women were
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less likely to remain abandoned forever and the number of abandoned Muslim women was considerably low. It is seen that at present even in remarriages, big amount of dowry is required and therefore remarriage of women has become less common among the rural poor Muslims in Malabar.

Respondents mentioned that second marriages are not taking place that frequently now due to the difficulties in arranging the dowry. Respondents also mentioned that as women get older their chances of getting remarried diminish. Due to early and repeated pregnancy and childbirth, women lose their health as well as sex appeal and by their mid 30’s they look like ugly old women. According to them nobody wants to marry such a woman and her chances for remarriage become less. Respondents also mentioned that the middle-aged women are at greater risks of being abandoned forever. According to them, due to deteriorated body and mind, women become unattractive after a few years of marriage and it increases their vulnerability to get abandoned. Due to all these factors, the number of abandoned Muslim women aged between 36-40 years is remaining high in the community and in the present study also their number is high.

In the sample the percentage of the younger respondents is only 37.2%. Discussion with social workers revealed that most of the young Muslim women after their first divorce/abandonment prefer remarriage as
there is demand for young women from older grooms. Serial marriage was also cited as a reason for the occurrence of remarriage among the young abandoned women. It has been found that in India the average age of women who marry again is 32 years (The Times of India 14/03/2012). Besides remarriage, the reluctance among the young Muslim women to disclose their present marital status, might have affected their number in the sample population.

4.1.4 Age at Abandonment

According to Agarwal (2002), any Mohamedan of sound mind who has attained puberty may divorce his wife whenever he desires without assigning any cause. Since divorce is an easy matter for men, they practice it for replacing the existing wife with a new younger one. Respondents mentioned that women’s age is a reason for abandonment. It is said that as the wife gets older, husband loses interest in her and eventually abandons her. By the time a woman reaches her middle-age she may be married and abandoned several times. In this study all respondents are abandoned by their husbands and the youngest is just 31 years old while the oldest is only 45 years old. Therefore an attempt is made to find out the age of abandonment of the respondents or how early they are abandoned by their husbands.
All the respondents of this study are abandoned by the age of 35 and many respondents are abandoned at very young age as low as 16 years. This is quite early and it emphasizes that respondents are married as well as abandoned at very young ages. All of them were married by the age of 17 i.e. before 18 years and abandoned by the age of 35. At the prime age of an adult woman, she is married and abandoned as a useless thing. This itself shows how early marriage constitutes the most extreme form of gender violence. The lives of these women are almost over by the age of 35 while most of their counterparts in the other regions of the state have just begun their life. At present these women live an exhausted and dreadful life of abandonment.
4.1.5 Present Age and Age at Marriage

Kerala has always enjoyed a relatively high mean female-age-at-marriage and it is true that the age at marriage has been showing a rising trend over the past few decades. But it appears that in Malabar, especially in rural areas, the age at marriage is very much lower than the state average (22.6 years). According to Jacob (2003), the onset of puberty is considered as the ideal age for the marriage of girls. From table 4.1 and 4.3 it is found that the respondents were married as early as 12 years and are abandoned by the age of 35 years. So here an attempt is made to find out the age at marriage of the respondents in association with their present age.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Age at marriage</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean age at Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>15-17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger group</td>
<td>83 (44.6%)</td>
<td>103 (55.4%)</td>
<td>186 (37.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31-35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle group</td>
<td>114 (53.8%)</td>
<td>98 (46.2%)</td>
<td>212 (42.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36-40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older group</td>
<td>87 (85.3%)</td>
<td>15 (14.7%)</td>
<td>102 (20.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(41-45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>500 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 clearly depicts an inverse relationship between the two variables. That is as the age of the respondents increases, age at marriage
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55.4% of the younger respondents were married at a higher age. A huge proportion of (85.3%) of the older respondents were married at or below the age of 14. That is, while majority of the younger respondents were married at a higher age, only 14.7% women in the older group were married at higher ages.

Compared to other two age groups, the younger cohort has the highest mean age at marriage, i.e. 14.7 years. It is also observed that the mean age at marriage consistently decreases with the increase in the present age of the respondents. The lowest mean is found among the older respondents, which is only 13.4 years. The difference in the mean age at marriage between the younger and older cohorts is just 1.3 years. Since there is only a slight difference in the average age at marriage between different age groups, it can be said that practically there is no significant increase in the age at marriage of the respondents. It also shows that the mean age at marriage of the respondents of this study (14.2 years) is significantly lower than the mean age at marriage of the Kerala women.

It is also evident from the above data that some of the respondents were married as children i.e. at or below the age of 14 years. The percentage of child marriage is found to be higher among the older cohort. That is, 85.3% of the older respondents were married while they were still children. The above table shows that as the age of the respondents decreases the percentage of child marriage among the different age groups decreases and vice versa. 55.4% of the younger respondents were married at a higher age. A huge proportion of (85.3%) of the older respondents were married at or below the age of 14. That is, while majority of the younger respondents were married at a higher age, only 14.7% women in the older group were married at higher ages.

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also decreases. That is, as the age of the respondents decreases the percentage of women who were married as children also consistently decreases and among the younger respondents only 44.6% were married as children (at or below the age of 14). It shows that earlier in rural Malabar among the poor Muslims child marriage was a common practice. Over the time the custom of child marriage was replaced by the practice of early marriage in which girls marry at slightly higher age but below the legal age of marriage. Therefore it can be said that even though there has been a slight increase in the age at marriage, it has not crossed 18 years yet. The biggest irony is that all this happens in Kerala where the average age at marriage of women recorded is higher than the rest of the Indian states.

4.1.6 Education

According to Gough (1961), historically a favourable cultural condition for female education has prevailed in Kerala. Rajan and Sreerupa (2007) mention that even in the mid-nineteenth century girls in Kerala enjoyed a level of education not available in any other part of the country. Today Kerala is a leading state in female literacy and education. According to the 2011 Census report, the female literacy rate in Kerala is 91.98%. Apart from literacy, Kerala also occupies a prime position among the rest of the states in educational expansion, especially for women.
According to the Sachar Committee report of 2011, Muslims in India lag behind their counterparts in other religious groups in the socio-economic and educational field. In Kerala also, Muslims in the northern districts of the state, are known to be backward with respect to their socio-economic as well as educational development. Mohammed (2007) indicates that the general backwardness of the Mappilas is chiefly associated with their low achievement in the field of education. In the rural areas of the state, the Muslim community is characterized by low education, especially among women. According to Nagi (1993), early marriage is a reason for the educational backwardness of girls in rural areas, because in rural areas it is problematic for the girls to continue their education after marriage. The respondents of this study are from the rural areas of Malabar and they are the victims of early marriage. So an attempt is made to find out whether early marriage has affected the education of the respondents.
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Table 4.4

Education of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 7th Std</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to SSLC</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to Higher Secondary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the data in the Table 4.5 shows a high literacy rate among the respondents (84.4%), their educational achievement is very poor when compared with the educational context of Kerala women. Kodoth (2009) has found that in recent years in Kerala, girls comprise more than 75% of the enrolment in various streams of higher education. As against this, data shows that respondents of this study hardly had access to higher education. The highest level of education among the respondents is only up to the Higher Secondary level. Out of the 500 respondents only 1.8% women were allowed to have access to Higher Secondary education and no one was able to complete it. It may be because, these girls were not allowed to complete Higher Secondary Education and were forced by their parents to marry early. If they had completed the Higher Secondary level, they would have reached 18 years by then. Since it is very difficult
for a girl of above 18 years to get a good prospective groom parents never let a girl to complete her education beyond SSLC.

4.1.7 Age at Marriage and Education

One of the latent functions of education is to delay the entry of children to the marriage market, especially to protect girls from early sexual relationships and motherhood. A person’s educational level or number of years in school will have a direct effect on his/her age at marriage (United Nations 1961; Majumdar and Gupta 1969). Nagi (1993) in his study *Child marriage in India*, mentions that when girls marry early, they remain either illiterate or dropout of schools very early. He also found a positive correlation between a girl’s age at marriage and education. Jejeebhoy (1995), in his study based on World Fertility Surveys and Demographic Health Survey, found that education has significant influence upon the age at marriage of women in developing countries. According to him, education is the single factor most strongly related to the postponement of marriage of a girl. Quisumbing and Hallman (2003), in their study, *Marriage in Transition: Evidence on Age, Education and Assets from Six Developing Countries*, conducted in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, South Africa, Mexico and the Philippines found that increase in age at marriage is associated with major social-structural changes such as increases in educational attainment,
urbanization, and the emergence of new roles for women. All this shows that there is a relation between age at marriage and education of girls.

Analysis of the education of the respondents, indicates that, it varies from illiteracy (no education) to higher secondary education. Based on this an attempt is made to find out whether there is any relation between the educational level of the respondents and their age at marriage.

Table 4.5

Age at marriage and Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Education of the Respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illiterates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 7th Std</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to SSLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to Higher Secondary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14 years</td>
<td>210 (73.9%)</td>
<td>284 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(53.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>210 (73.9%)</td>
<td>284 (100%)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years</td>
<td>184 (85.2%)</td>
<td>216 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(46.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years</td>
<td>19 (8.8%)</td>
<td>216 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>394 (78.8%)</td>
<td>500 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis shows that the age at marriage of the respondents and their education are directly proportional to each other. As the age at marriage increased the number of respondents who had access to higher classes also increased. Among the illiterate respondents, 94.9 % women got
married by the age of 14. It can also be seen that all the respondents, who have studied up to SSLC (19) and Higher Secondary Education (9) are married later i.e. at the age of 15-17. Even though there are only 28 respondents who have studied up to SSLC or above, they all got married after the age of 15. It shows that education can delay the age at marriage of the respondents. This finding is consistent with those of Sivaram, Richard and Rao (1995). In their study, Early marriage among rural and urban females in South India, they found that early marriage is negatively related to the educational status of the brides concerned and that secondary education and above (10 or more years) can significantly reduce the frequency of early marriage.

In the present study, illiterate women reported the lowest mean age at marriage. It was found that mean age at marriage among the illiterate women was 13.3 years which is lower than the total average age at marriage of the respondents. So it is evident that the lower the age at marriage of girls, lower will be their educational attainment. This finding of the present study is in consistent with the finding of Le Fevre, Quiroga and Murphy (2004) that age at marriage of women significantly varies according to the educational attainment of women and women who are more educated have a higher age at marriage compared to those who are less educated (up to primary level school only). Several other studies on early marriage have also found a close association between age at
marriage of girls and their education. They all proved that girls who marry early have low level of education (Bayisenge 2010).

Discussion with school teachers in the study area revealed that early marriage is a barrier to girls’ education in Malabar, especially among the Muslim girl students. The rate of dropout is considerably high. On an average, from a single school each year, about six to seven Muslim girls are being withdrawn from high school classes for marriage. Anil (1997) also has found similar situations in his study in Malappuram schools. He found, that each year due to early marriage 5 to 7 girls are being withdrawn from class rooms. Dubey and Dubey (1999) also report that growing priority for early marriage stands out as the major reason for high dropout among girls. They mention that an alarming number of Muslim girls are dropping out of school for marrying early. In this study also it is found that girls are mostly pulled out of schools for marriage, while they reach high school classes. It indicates that parents do not mind sending girls to school up to the age of 15 (78.8% has attained education up to the 7th standard). The start of menstruation is a significant sign for the parents that the girl is ready for marriage. Therefore once girls are promoted to high school classes, by that time they may reach 14-15 years, thinking that it is the right time for her marriage, parents try to arrange marriage and withdraw the girls from schools. Obeng (2002) in his study,
Early Marriage among the Muslim women in Ghana also has expressed that early marriage was a strong barrier to girls’ schooling.

The teachers of Govt. High School, Koottayi, another Panchayat coming under the study, also mentioned that, parents fear that they may fail to find a groom for their daughter if it is known that she has turned 15. Therefore marriages are held hurriedly soon after girls reach high school classes. Discussion with teachers shows that early marriage is a major obstacle that prevents Muslim girls from attaining higher education. This is supported by the findings of Menon (2002), who suggests that early marriage is a reason for the educational backwardness of the Muslim girls in Malabar. The analysis of the education shows that there is not much variation with regard to the educational level of the respondents. Even though a few exceptions are found in the sample, nobody had access beyond the higher secondary education. So in this study, education of the respondents is not considered as a variable for further analysis.

4.2 Determinants of Early Marriage

One of the objectives of the study is to find out the socio-economic factors that promote and reinforce the practice of early marriage of the Muslim girls in Malabar. The United Nations Children’s Fund (2005) cautions that the practice of early marriage is hazardous to both individual and society. Still in many places parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still children. It is seen that in Malabar, the
devastating impacts of early marriage are largely ignored by the society and the practice is widely recognized. The rampanty of early marriage among the Muslims in Malabar indicates that there are certain elements that affect this inhuman practice. The literature survey conducted to identify various elements affecting the practice of early marriage, shows that the intensity and nature of the factors influencing the practice of early marriage vary from place to place and time to time, even though they maintain some common elements.

In every society where early marriage of girls is widespread, the practice will be in accordance with certain elements of the culture of that society which promote and reinforce it. According to Tristam (2011), early marriage is determined by multiple factors: social, economic, religious etc. In many cases, a mixture of these causes results in the imprisonment of children in marriages without their consent. According to the Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls (2000), there are many reasons for early marriage of girls such as societal coercion, religion and economics. The study highlights that discrimination against women and girls is the underlying reason behind every early marriages. However, the Forum explicitly points out three common factors responsible for the early marriage of girl children. They are 1. Culture and religion 2. Economy and poverty and 3. Preference for younger girls for safe sex.
According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2007), in addition to tradition and culture, several other factors also promote and reinforce early marriage among the girls in parts of Asia and Africa. They are family ties, gender inequality, poverty, control over sexuality and protecting family honour. Alemu (2006), in his study in Ethiopia indicates that the strongest reason for early marriage is the desire or need to maintain the family’s good name and social standing. A critical analysis of the factors related to early marriage by Sabina (2003) in her study South Asia indicates that, increasingly, the social and economic transformations are creating social conflicts in the patriarchal control of women's sexuality which in turn force them to marry at a younger age. Economic pressure often forces parents to get their daughters married early and parental preference for early marriage over education is a financial strategy, since education is expensive and there will be no return on girl’s education.

Amin, Chong, and Haberland (2007), argues that factors like traditional gender norms- the value of virginity and parental concerns surrounding premarital sex, pressure of marriage transactions (or dowries) and poverty also affect early marriages in India. According to Shulman (2006), the practice of early marriage in rural India is deeply rooted in cultural values and grounded in social structures. Parihar (2001) also found that in rural parts of India, poverty is a major factor influencing
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early marriage and instances of marriages of old men to younger girls for bride prices are common. For Nagi (1993), early marriage is more deeply rooted in rural parts of the country, and there are clear rural urban differences in the practice of early marriage. People accept the practice of child marriage even today because of the fact that it has become a custom which is to be followed.

Amin, Simeen and Lopita (2002) found that in a vast majority of early marriages, a girl’s young age is perceived to be a desirable attribute for marriage, therefore the older the girl the less likely her chances for marriage. Several other studies (Buss 1995; Neuliep 2006) also have mentioned that generally men worldwide prefer girls who are younger than themselves for marriage. Instances of Arabic marriage are also reported from the rural areas of Malabar. The Arab traders prefer to have an Indian girl for their sexual pleasure because of their submissive nature. The myth that sex with young children strengthens one's masculinity and improves virility is a major factor for selecting the little children as wives.

Based on the available literature on the causes of early marriage, a list of six determining factors which are being repeatedly mentioned, especially in the Indian context are listed out in the interview schedule to find out the determining factors of early marriage among Muslim girls in Malabar.
Table 4.6

Determinants of Early Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Early marriage is deep rooted in the culture of the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Preference for younger girls in marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Way to protect girls from sexual exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Low dowry requirement in early marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Early marriage is an economic strategy for poor parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Polygyny – the religious permission for Muslim men to marry several times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the six factors and their relevance to early marriage in their cultural context were explained to the respondents. They were asked to mention the most important factor that influences in the practice of early marriage of Muslim girls in their area. That is, giving the first rank to the most important factor leading to early marriage according to them, next the second most important factor and so on. To find out the rank order of each factor that determine the early marriage among Muslim girls in Malabar, the total number of rank frequency for each determining factor is divided by the number of respondents and the mean score for each determining factor is calculated. Then the first rank is given to the
determining factor that has the highest mean, second rank to the second highest mean and so on. The rank order is given in the Table 4.8.

Table 4.7
The rank order of the determinants of Early Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Determinants of Early Marriage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Low dowry requirement in early marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Early marriage is deep rooted in the culture of the society.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Preference for younger girls in marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Polygyny – the religious option for men to marry several times.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Early marriage is an economic strategy for poor parents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>To protect girls from sexual exploitation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table shows that the mean calculated for different factors are almost equal. It just varies from 3.7860 to 3.0200. Since there are no significant differences in the mean calculated it can be inferred that all factors are equally important. Both social as well as economic factors together accelerate the practice of early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar. As Shiva (1993) mentions, women’s oppression is the impact of economy-
Determinants of Early Marriage

A bandoned Muslim Wives – Victims of Early Marriage

culture dualism which is intensified by the cultural and religious ideologies. Most of these factors that control and exploit women’s lives are inter-connected and influenced by each other. So an in-depth analysis of all these factors are carried out.

4.2.1 Low dowry requirement in Early Marriage

In India, despite the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), the dowry system continues unabated and unchallenged even in this 21st century. According to Puri (1999), dowry refers to the property given to the daughter by her parents and family to take with her into marriage. Dowry is one of the most ancient practices of Indian society. It is a traditional concept in Indian culture and the practice of dowry is still very much common. Dowry is so deeply entrenched in our society that a regular marriage without dowry is almost unthinkable. Even though dowry in Indian context is a cultural concept, in modern day it is highly attributed to marriages as an important economic factor. According to the respondents, there is a relationship between the amount of dowry and the age at marriage of Muslim girls in their area. When the girl is young the amount of dowry will be low and if the girl is older i.e. above 18 years, a huge amount of dowry will be required for her marriage. Respondents mentioned that in their community usually men prefer to have younger girls for marriage and for that they tend to compromise on the size of the dowry. Since the demand for younger girls has pushed up the amount of
dowry for older girls (above the age of 18 years), most of the marriages are conducted before the girl reaches 18 years. By doing so, poor parents can considerably reduce the amount of dowry for the marriage of their daughter.

Even though respondents talked about the practice of dowry only among the Muslims in Malabar, it is a fact that dowry is not unique to Muslim marriages. Kodoth (2006) in her study on the prevalence of dowry in Kerala shows that the practice is widely accepted as an inevitable and inescapable reality in almost all communities in the state (regardless of the education of women). However, the importance and quantum of dowry in marriages slightly vary from region to region. According to Puthenkulam’s (1977) survey, a fair amount of wealth in the form of dowry is given at the time of marriage in north Kerala (32.7%) than in central (29.8%) and south (24%). It shows that the dowry demand is higher in north Kerala. Since north Kerala has a Muslim majority population it can be said that a considerable size of dowry is given at Muslims marriages. Among the Muslims, dowry is an old custom that is strongly linked with the religion. Palriwal (2003), mentions that in a survey by the All India Democratic Women’s Association among different religious communities, it is found that usually a big dowry is paid in Muslim marriages. It also found that Muslims particularly were in
support of dowry because Prophet Mohammed gave dowry to his
daughter and the roots of the tradition lie there.

Further discussions revealed that ‘Gulf boom’ is an important factor
affecting the size of dowry in Muslim marriages and it has caused a
steady rise in the marriage of minor girls in the districts of Malabar.
Kurien (2002) denotes that the tendency towards early marriage for girls
in the Muslim community has increased following Gulf migration.
Generally men perceive marriage as a means to obtain money for Gulf
migration. According to Franke and Chasin (1994) in Kerala, the great
influx of money from workers in the Gulf States has revived the dowry
system. Gulati (1993) also found a relationship between the Gulf money
and dowry demand in marriages among the lower class Muslims. She
argues that the high demand for dowry among the lower class Muslims
has been due to the inflow of money from the Middle – East. The
financial consequences of dowry payments will be greater on poorer
parents and often impoverishes the backbone of the family. Gulf
migration also has significantly raised the amount of dowry for older
girls. The massive dowry requirement in marriages, puts parents under
pressure to regard their daughters as huge burdens on the family, to be
disposed off as early as possible. Therefore parents try to marry their
daughters while she is still young with a lesser dowry.
Chapter IV

Rank analysis shows that the highest mean is found for ‘low dowry requirement in early marriage’. Therefore it is cited as the most important factor affecting the practice of early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar. Thus in the study, it is found that the amount of dowry is the crucial determinant of early marriage among the girls of the lower class Muslim families in Malabar. Basheer (2004), also found that low demand for dowry in early marriages is a reason for the persistence of early marriage in Malappuram. According to him, like any other conservative Indian community, inured to shelling out massive dowries, Malappuram Muslims see their daughters as huge economic liabilities and try to get rid of them as early as possible.

According to The Hindu (30/11/2008), in some parts of Malabar, mostly young girls are being married to rich and older married men from neighbouring Karnataka state only because they ask less dowry than their counterparts in Kerala do. Respondents also mentioned that girls are married at an early age to men from Mysore because their parents think that at least their daughters can escape from the poverty and will have a good life. A prominent social worker in Malappuram mentioned that Mysore marriage was prevalent some 20 to 30 years back in Kerala. Because of the Governmental and Police actions, by the end of 90's it was somewhat eradicated. But recently about 3 to 4 years back, the problem
has reappeared and it has also affected the practice of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in Malabar.

4.2.2 Early Marriage is deep rooted in the culture of the society

A report of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2006) says that in many societies early marriage is a social norm for girls. The traditional notion of child marriage continues to justify early marriage as a positive social norm with social and financial benefits. Respondents mentioned that in their community early marriage is recognized as a social norm for girls. So the parents are being pressured to marry off their daughters according to the local expectations. Otherwise they may be humiliated in the society. Respondents also mentioned that there is social stigma towards girls who stay unmarried for long and an unmarried girl above 18 years may be considered as a disgrace to the entire family. Therefore to safeguard the family honour and to avoid shame and stigmatization, parents encourage early marriage for their daughters.

Discussions revealed that among the Muslims of the poor economic strata, most of the customs have a religious understanding. Religion has a strong influence upon every aspect of their lives. The social practices and customs of the society are largely shaped by the traditional Islamic views and major social institutions like marriage and divorce are invariably governed by the traditional religious patriarchy. In Islamic societies early
marriage is not just a cultural practice. The Muslim Code allows it. Since Islam does not have a prescribed age for the marriage of girls, early marriages continue unabated among the Muslims. According to Nisa (2009), in Islamic societies religion has a significant influence upon the age at marriage of girls. Like in any other Muslim communities, in Malabar also early marriages are conducted customarily in accordance with the religious tenets especially among the lower class Muslim families. Bevan-Jones and Jones (1941) in their work *Women in Islam*, has tried to explain why early marriage has gained wide social/religious acceptance among the Islamic societies. In most of the traditional Islamic societies, early marriage is a part of the very fabric of Islam and they contend that early marriage is a custom sanctioned by Mohammed who himself married to a child bride. The community follows what the prophet has done earlier and it has gained wide social acceptance. Several other studies conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (2006); International Centre for Research on Women (2007) and Rahman and Kabir (2005) also have reported that religious and cultural norms exert a strong pressure upon parents to marry off their daughters as early as possible.

Respondents also mentioned certain other possible issues like fear of gossip about unmarried girls and her family, effort to maintain family status etc have a positive effect on this traditional inhumane practice. A
more or less similar view has been expressed by the United Nations Children’s Fund (2004), in its study in Niger where it was found that early marriage for families is a matter of family honour. Hassan (2008) shows that among the Indian Muslims, early marriage is a custom.

The respondents of the study realize that ‘early marriage is deeply rooted in the culture of the society’ and consider it as the second most important factor determining the practice of early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar. Based on the above analysis, it can be said that since early marriage is considered as part of social/religious custom among the lower strata Muslims in Malabar, it is widespread. The distinct Mappila culture in Malabar has significant impact upon the age at marriage of girls and therefore early marriages are rampant among the Muslims.

4.2.3. Preference for younger girls in marriage

The respondents mentioned that preference for younger girls is another important reason of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in Malabar. According to Basheer (2004), gulf-boom has significantly affected the practice of early marriage of girls in Malabar. The prospective Gulf grooms usually seek young brides and these marriages set standards for other men also. This in turn prompts them to take up younger wives whenever they marry. Respondents also mentioned that men always have a preference for younger girls regardless of their age and economic status. Normally the age of the bridegroom is never taken into consideration.
Whatever may be the age of the husband, wife should be younger, preferably below the age of 18. Preference for younger girls has reduced the demand for older ones (aged above 18 years) and pushed up dowries for them. According to the respondents ‘preference for younger girls’ is a strong motive leading to the early marriage of poor Muslim girls in Malabar. Another phenomenon affecting early marriage of poor Muslim girls is ‘Arab marriages’ which was once a regular feature in erstwhile Malabar. Govind (2002) accords that of late, ‘Arabikalyanams’ have rampantly increased the rate of early marriages. Even today ‘Arab marriages’ are taking place across the Malabar region in which young Muslim girls from poor families in rural areas are married to rich and older men from Saudi Arabia. Men’s special interest for younger girls as their sexual partners prompt them to marry young girls. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) in their objectification theory says that sexual objectification is a form of gender oppression whereby 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) others. This theory can be applied in this study also, as young girls are preferred just for the sexual pleasure and they are treated as objects of sexual pleasure. In a study in Bangladesh, Field and Ambrus (2008), also report that among the Muslims, the high demand for younger girls is a reason for the high rate of early marriage of girls in the country.
4.2.4 Polygyny – The religious permission for men to marry several times

According to Singh (2011), it is a fact that in many Muslim societies, polygyny is still practiced: men are permitted to have four wives at a time. Hanna (2004) supports this view by saying that due to single sided religious options like polygyny and tala’aq, in Muslim societies men can marry and divorce as many times as he wishes – obviously with conditions. It shows that only men are allowed to practice polygyny and as noted by Menski (2006), the Islamic law also permits rather too easy divorce for men. Since men are given the right for marriage and divorce on his own will, it encourages them to marry several times.

Thernborn (2004), in his study Between Sex and Power, conducted in Taiwan suggests that polygyny is a reason for the prevalence of early marriage of girls among the poor strata. Similarly several other studies mention ‘polygyny’ as a significant practice affecting the marriage practices of Muslims whereby a man can have upto four wives at a time. But among the Muslims in Malabar, the age old practice of polygyny as such is not found. Yet it is the same option that allows men to take up several wives in their life. So in this study also the term ‘polygyny’ is used to denote multiple marriages. The Hindu (10/11/2008), reports that even though Muslim men in Malabar do not practice polygyny (having upto four wives at a time), they practice ‘serial marriage’ whereby many
men take a second or third wife after divorcing the existing wife. Respondents also mentioned that being very poor, men are not able to keep several wives at a time. Instead they divorce the existing wife and marry new one. Respondents mentioned that men resort to serial marriages due to the religious sanction given to the practice of polygyny. Each time he marries, looks for younger girls that in turn increase the rate of early marriage of poor girls. Respondents of the study assigned the fourth rank to ‘Polygyny’ and said that it has a strong impact upon early marriage of poor girls. It is clear that the religious and social acceptance of tala’aq also encourages men to divorce and marry several times. Therefore it can be said that polygyny is one of the important reasons for early marriage, that promotes and reinforces the practice among the poor Muslim girls in Malabar. This finding is supported by the International Center for Research on Women (2007) that says that polygyny is an important factor leading to early marriage of girls in many societies.

A close observation reveals that while polygyny is nearly absent among the Muslims in other parts of the state as revealed by Menon (1981), in the present study evidences suggest that the practice is still remaining in the form of serial marriages among the Muslims of Malabar especially the poor sections of the community. As Basheer (2004) says, the Mappilas of Malabar is a tradition bound society and this might be the reason for the prevalence of traditional religious practices like polygyny
and early marriage. However polygyny, the customary practice of men keeping several wives at a time was not found during the field work of this study. Also nobody in the sample mentioned about the existence of polygyny in the area. Further analysis reveals that Muslim men benefit out of multiple marriages in two ways. One is that men practice serial marriage for financial gain. That is a Muslim man consider serial marriage as a way to get money and therefore he marries several times. Secondly men practice serial marriage to obtain younger girls for sexual gratification. Since both early marriage and polygyny are religiously sanctioned it is easy for a man to get a tender female body along with money in the form of dowry to enjoy even if he is already married. Here religion is often misused and deployed as a legitimate means of female exploitation.

In the words of V. P. Suhara, the chairperson of Nisa Progressive Muslim Women's Forum, a woman activist particularly involved with Muslim women's issues, male priests have misinterpreted the Qur'an, which did not advocate polygamy or instant 'talaq (Menon 2009). Engineer (2011) accords that a major part of the body of shari’ah law comprises the Prophet’s pronouncements, referred to as the hadith. In all schools of law in Islam, hadith has played a very important role in juristic formulations. Over a period of time, hadith gained more importance than the Qur’an. The Qur’anic injunctions in respect of women were not
acceptable in a patriarchal culture, given that the injunctions directly challenged the ostensible authority of men and made women equal to men in every respect. For this reason, even very unambiguous formulations of the Qur’an were subjected to strange interpretations with the help of hadith, contradicting basic tenets of the Qur’an. These hadith represented the cultural ethos of society rather than Qur’anic injunctions. Where the Qur’an does not put any restrictions on women, these hadith were employed to put severe restrictions on them. Therefore, Qur’an and hadith became two worlds apart and hadith was invoked more and more to subjugate women and to curtail their rights.

4.2.5 Early marriage is an economic strategy for poor parents.

According to Ooto-Oyortey and Pobi (2003), globally, poverty is a major cause, as well as a consequence of early marriage for many young girls under the age of 18. In many traditional settings, poor families use ‘the early marriage of daughters’ as a strategy for reducing their own economic vulnerability, shifting the economic burden related to a daughter’s care to the husband’s family. They found that for poverty stricken families, early marriage is a blessing. Another study conducted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2006), also found that early marriage is valued as an economic coping strategy which reduces the costs of raising daughters. In this sense, poverty becomes a
primary reason for early marriages because of perceived benefits to the family and the daughter.

According to Bhat, Sen and Pradhan (2005), the practice of early marriage is often perceived as a financial coping strategy by poor parents. Another study by Amin, Chong and Haberland (2007) in Bangladesh found that poverty is an underpinning factor of early marriage of girls. Marrying off more than one daughter at the same time is not so uncommon here in order to save money spend on wedding expenses. Just like this, in Malabar also it is not rare that parents conduct the marriage of one or two daughters simultaneously so that they can reduce the wedding expenses.

Respondents mentioned that in their community the birth of a girl child is regarded as a disaster to the family. Poor parents seek to marry their daughters as early as possible so as to get rid of the financial responsibilities that would arise in future due to her marriage. Parents also think that early marriage would lessen the financial difficulties that can result from if a daughter remains unmarried for long. Because if she marries early her parents would have one less mouth to feed. Respondents mentioned that early marriage is often regarded as a survival strategy of the poor parents and they gave the fifth rank to this factor. Early marriage is usually found among the poor families. There are no evidences of the prevalence of early marriage among the upper class
Muslims in Malabar. Discussions also pointed to the fact that parents of
girl children often receive financial assistance from Arab marriages, and it
has significantly promoted early marriage of the poor Muslim girls to old
rich Arab men.

Based on the above analysis it can be said that it is not surprising that
in this study also poor parents consider early marriage as an economic
survival strategy that can considerably reduce the financial burden that
can happen by the marriage of their daughters at a later age. Therefore
they try to marry their daughters as early as possible. This finding
corroborates the ideas of the United Nations Children’s Fund (2001), that
found that in poorer households, girls are viewed as additional burden on
family resources and therefore parents tend to marry them off as a family
survival strategy.

4.2.6 A way to protect girls from sexual exploitation

Parents regard early marriage as one of the best methods of protection
for their adolescent girls. It is seen that in developing countries where
early marriage is reportedly rampant, parents prefer to marry their
daughters much earlier to safeguard their chastity. For example in
Gambia where female chastity is highly valued, the age at marriage of
girls has been reported as low as 10 years (Jeng and Taylor-Thomas
1985). According to the report on early marriage by the Forum on
Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls (2001), the desire to protect
girls’ virginity drives many parents to force their daughters into marriage at an extremely young age.

It is a fact that in patriarchal societies, women are perceived just like sex objects by men and sex-related crimes against girls are increasing day by day. It may urge poor parents to perceive early marriage as the only option left to safeguard the chastity of their daughters. Prof. Mohammadunni Elias, the Principal of MES College, Malappuram mentioned that a huge bulk of the Muslim population in rural areas of Malappuram is still illiterate and are bound by the old misconceptions about sex related issues. It is believed that girls become sexually active with their ‘menarche’ and parents fear that they may easily get exploited by men. As a result, girls are married off soon after the beginning of menarche. Respondents also mentioned that early marriage is often considered as a way to protect daughters from sexual exploitation and harassment. Respondents gave it the sixth rank as it also had significant impact upon early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar.

As in traditional societies, in Malabar Muslim society also early marriage is considered as a way to ensure that a wife is “protected” or placed firmly under male control. Clark (2004), in her study found that in Africa, some researchers, policymakers, and parents may even actively encourage early marriage as a protective strategy to avoid the perceived dangers of premarital sex, including pregnancy and sexually transmitted
infections (STIs). Parents in Malawi, for example, deliberately encourage early marriages to shield their daughters from such perceived risks (Bracher, Santow and Watkins 2003).

Analysis of the determinants of early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar reveals that all the economic, cultural and religious factors are interrelated. There is not much difference between the mean values of the various factors studied. According to the respondents all factors are equally important in promoting the practice, both economy and culture equally reinforce, early marriage of the Muslim girls in Malabar. According to Marx, factors such as patriarchy, culture and religion can essentially be seen as the by-products of capitalism. In his view, in patriarchal societies women are doubly victimized and exploited by the effects of capitalism.

Along with the economic factors, culture also has significantly influenced the practice of marrying girls early. As Shiva (1993) states, patriarchal culture leads to the oppression of women in male dominating societies. According to her, exploitation of women is more frequent in patriarchal societies that preserve cultural elements and tradition that justifies women’s oppression. In Malabar the Muslims have a distinct culture that has been shaped according to the traditional religious views and beliefs. In the present study of early marriage among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar, religion plays a very important part. Osella and
Osella (2007), shows that Malabar Muslims are highly traditional and religious tenets have very significant effects on their life. The barriers of gender and religion make the condition of Muslim women pathetic. She is often caught in the spiral of poverty and patriarchy; the two significant forces underpinning the practice of early marriage. Moreover, there is a tendency among men to perceive women as sexual objects as indicated by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997).

4.3 Summary

Studies and reports have mentioned that early marriage prevails among the rural poor Muslims. Analysis of the socio-economic background of the respondents proved that it is a fact. All of them belong to the poor Muslim families in the rural areas of Malabar. Based on their age at marriage the respondents were categorized into two. The respondents married between the age of 12-14 and those who married between the age of 15-17. It is found that the sample contains women who were married at a very low age, as low as 12 and the average age at marriage of the respondents was calculated to be 15.1 years. Based on their present age, the respondents are classified into three: the younger respondents aged between 31 and 35, the middle aged respondents aged between 36 and 40 and the older respondents who are aged between 41 and 45. Majority of the younger respondents were married at higher ages (below 18) while most of the older respondents at or below the age of 14. Education of the
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respondents varies from ‘no education’ (illiteracy) to ‘Higher Secondary Education’. Further analysis shows that as the age at marriage increases, education also increases.

One of the objectives of the study was to find out the determinants of early marriage of Muslim girls in Malabar. A rank analysis shows that dowry is the most important determinant of early marriage. Dowry was given the first rank by the respondents. It was clear that due to the pressure from high dowry demand, parents often seek to marry their daughters earlier. It is also found that men from Karnataka and other states demand low amount of dowry compared to their counterparts in Kerala. Poor parents who find it difficult to arrange high dowry often marry their daughters in so called ‘Mysore marriages’. The second rank was given to ‘early marriage is deep rooted in the culture of the society. Parents are forced to marry their daughters according to the local expectations, failure of which inevitably dishonours the family. According to the respondents men have a special interest on younger girls. So the third rank was given to the factor ‘preference for younger girls in marriage’. Girls of poor families are married to older men from Arab countries even today. The fourth rank was given to ‘polygyny’. Respondents mentioned that even though the age old custom of polygyny as such is not practiced among them, men engage in serial marriages in which they marry a new wife after divorcing the existing one. During the
field work also no remnants of polygyny was observed among the rural Muslims in Malabar. There were no evidences of more than one wives living together. The fifth rank was assigned to ‘early marriage is an economic strategy for poor parents’. Respondents ranked the statement ‘early marriage is a way to protect girls from sexual exploitation and harassment including pre-marital sex’ as the sixth determining factor that promotes and reinforces the practice of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in the rural areas of Malabar. According to the respondents, generally women and girl children have an inferior status and it increases their chances of being exploited by men. So out of fear parents try to marry their daughters earlier.

Analysis shows that various determinants of early marriage such as economy, religion and culture are inseparably related to each other. Dowry forms a cultural as well as economic concept that reflects and reinforces the inferior and oppressed status of women. Dowry can be considered as one of the most extreme types of ‘patriarchal form of oppression’. Due to financial constraints girls are pushed into abusive marriages, where she lives an exploited and oppressed life. The exploitation as described by Marx is applicable here. Women’s economic dependency upon men is the major reason for their continuous exploitation by men supported by culture and religion. Culture is the creation of men and is manipulated by men for their vested interests.