Chapter – 8
Findings and Conclusion

Marriage is an institution sanctioned by societies to establish durable bonds between males and females and to permit sexual intercourse for the implied purpose of parenthood and the establishment of a family. Marriage is almost obligatory and unavoidable for an average Indian. Life without marriage is almost unthinkable in India and there is a sharp social stigma attached to those who remain unmarried for long. India has a deep-rooted long-standing and wide-spread tradition in favour of marriage as a basic ritual. Religion and culture give great significance to the custom of marriage. Marriage in India is a holy performance of religious duties. Marriage among Hindus is a religious sacrament regarded not only as a union of two individuals, but also as the union of two families, making them almost like blood relatives. The society’s expectation and the agreement of the persons married are that the bond will continue throughout their natural lives. Contrary to Hindu marriage, Islam marriage is considered as a civil contract for legalizing sexual intercourse and the procreation of children.

In the traditional family in India, parents are morally obliged to find mates for their children and the children to accept their parental choice. Parents of female children often try to settle their daughters’ future as early as possible. Although the payment of dowry for marriages is illegal
in India, it remains widespread all over the country. Dowry as a traditional concept, occupies a prominent position in Indian marriages. Dowry is clearly a huge problem for a poor family and in order to reduce the financial burden, poor parents often try to arrange the marriage of their daughters as early as possible to good family with less dowry. Despite legislation forbidding child marriage in India since 1929 (Child Marriage Restraint Act), the adoption of the much more progressive Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006 and the existence of many initiatives to prevent child marriage, marrying girls at a very tender age continues to be accepted – as a social norm - by large sections of society. According to the estimates of the United Nations Children’s Fund, 40% of the world’s child marriages take place in India. While the practice continues to be strong in Indian States like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar etc which are underscored by low achievements in the social and economic arena, studies prove that regardless of the social progress made, early marriage is prevalent in almost all states. In most of these places the ideal age of marriage of girls lies somewhere between 14-16 years.

Even though Kerala boasts of high female literacy and mean age at marriage, studies indicate that close to one tenth of Kerala women are married before they attain 18 years. In Kerala the highest number of underage marriages takes place in Malabar, the northern region of Kerala occupied by a majority of Muslims. According to Basheer (2002) the
high concentration of the educationally, socially and economically backward Muslim population in the districts of Malabar could be the major reason for the low age at marriage of girls here. He says that, according to the report of the survey conducted across the state by the Population Research Centre of the Institute for Social and Economic Change in 2001, the highest rate of early marriage is found in Malappuram district (36%) followed by Kannur (19%) and Kozhikkode (14%).

A survey by the Social Welfare Department conducted in 2010 in Malappuram district shows that, the practice of early marriage is widely prevalent among the Muslims compared to their counterparts in other religions (Christy 2013). In the rural areas of Malabar early marriage has got wide recognition especially among the poor Muslims. The practice is going rampant in Malabar without considering its consequences upon the girls. It is strongly argued that the low age at marriage of girls is the effect of women’s low social status in a community (Chatterjee 1990). Studies have shown that the low status of women is directly linked to various forms of violence against them, including early marriage. Researches into the problem of early marriage of girl children indicate that, it is a form of gender exploitation that is hazardous to the future well-being of thousands of female children.
Chapter VIII

Nowadays, Kerala is witnessing serious controversies on the Muslim girls’ marriageable age; while Muslim groups want minimum marital age scrapped, social reformers, women activists and several other organizations in and out of the community, has raised voice against this move. Those who stand against lowering the Muslim female age at marriage, assert that this orthodoxy movement will drive back the Muslim women who have come a long way in education and other professions. According to them, bringing down the marriageable age of girls is regressive in the present context, where there is a mounting demand for raising the minimum age of marriage for girls considering the growing rate of divorces among youngsters. It is said that early age at marriage of girls is a form of gender based violence which is often associated with increased risks of abandonment. This study is a modest attempt to address the issue of early marriage of the Muslim girls from a gender violence perspective, the culmination of which is abandonment.

The present study focused on the life experiences of abandoned Muslim wives who are the victims of early marriage. The aim of the study was to find out the causes and the consequences of early marriage upon the life of the victims. This research has made an attempt to shed some light on violence in early marriage and its association with early abandonment. It attempted to examine the victims’ perception about the practice of early marriage based on which the study further proceeds to
assess their awareness about exploitation in early marriage. The present research attempted to identify the factors leading to abandonment and to address various problems encountered by the victims of early marriage in their present life.

Abandoned Muslim wives of the age-group 31-45 years living in the rural areas of Malabar were the respondents. Respondents were selected from three Muslim populous districts in Malabar – Malappuram, Kannur and Kozhikode. Since the sampling frame was not available, the snowball sampling technique was adopted for locating the sample. From these three districts ten Panchayats were selected purposefully where early marriage is widespread and 50 respondents were drawn from each Panchayat. Since Malappuram is the third largest district in Kerala and Muslims are a majority, 200 respondents were chosen from four selected Panchayats. From Kannur and Kozhikode three Panchayats were selected and together a total of 300 respondents were selected from these two districts thereby making the size of the sample 500. The tool used for the primary data collection was interview schedule. Informal discussions conducted with respondents and key informants of the study helped to obtain a deep insight into the problem. The collected data was coded, tabulated and analysed using SPSS. Karl Marx’s theory of exploitation, Vandana Shiva’s views on patriarchy and cultural oppression of women, the culture of violence theory of Wolfgang and Ferracuti, objectification
theory of Fredrickson and Roberts and Levinger’s social exchange theory were incorporated as the theoretical framework of the study.

8.1 Determinants of Early Marriage

Early marriage is a complex phenomenon due to various factors. Analysis of the profile of the respondents revealed that despite the existence of laws prohibiting underage marriages, the practice of early marriage and wife abandonment were widespread among the Muslims of the lower economic strata in the rural parts of Malabar. It is seen that after abandonment women usually reverted back to their parental home. So in order to get an idea about the socio-economic background of the respondents, the socio-economic status of the parental family of the respondents was analysed. The Socio-Economic Status was analysed with a scale developed by S.C. Tiwari, Aditya Kumar and Ambrish Kumar (2005) known as ‘the Scale to measure the Socio-Economic Status in urban and rural communities in India’. Based on the final scores of the respondents, it was found that all of them belong to lower class families. Thus it was confirmed that early marriage prevails high among the rural poor Muslims. With regard to the occupational status of the respondents, 85.8% of the respondents were unemployed and the rest 14.2% were engaged in menial jobs like housemaids to rich families, casual labourers of 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 parents. While 31.4% women were looked after by their sons or brothers/elder siblings, the remaining 10.2% were depending on their relatives for the survival.

Age is taken as the analytical framework of this study since it is a very important demographic component that influences the life of an individual. It has significant influence upon women’s opinion about early marriage and abandonment. All the respondents of the study were married before the age of 18 and the youngest was only 12 years at the time of marriage. This shows the rampancy of early marriage of girl children in the study area and how ineffective the enacted law is in curbing such marriages. As the focus of this study is on early marriage, age at marriage is an important independent variable in this study. Respondents were categorized into two groups based on their age at marriage: respondents married at or below the age of 14 years (56.8%) and those who are married between the age of 15 to 17 years (43.2%). The mean age at marriage of the respondents was found to be just 15.1 years. It showed 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 and among the poor Muslim girls in the rural areas of Malabar, the age at marriage is considerably low, as low as 12 years.
The present age of the respondents is the other important variable in this study. It varied from 31 to 45 years. Based on their present age respondents were categorized into three groups. The younger cohort of the age group 31 – 35 years (37.2%), the middle-aged cohort of 36 – 40 years (42.2%) and the older cohort of the age group 41 – 45 years (20.4%). The number of older women is less in the sample population. This could be because of the high rate of remarriage in the past. Discussion with the key informants of the study revealed that now the incidence of remarriages among the younger women has come down due to various reasons. Analysis showed that younger respondents comparatively have a higher age at marriage than the older respondents. The mean age at marriage for older cohort was found to be 13.4 years while it was 14.7 years for the young cohort.

All the respondents of this study are abandoned by their husbands. The youngest respondent is 31 years old and the oldest is just 45 years old. So the study made an attempt to understand how early abandonments take place. Analysis of the age at abandonment of the respondents revealed that all of them were abandoned by the age of 35 and many respondents were abandoned at a very young age. 12% of the respondents were abandoned between the age of 16 – 20. 27.2% respondents were abandoned between the age of 21 – 25. 30%
Findings & Conclusion

respondents were abandoned between the age of 26 – 30 and the remaining 30.8% were abandoned between the age of 31 – 35.

Analysis of the education of the respondents showed that 84.4 % were literate and that was almost proportional to the state female literacy rate. But when compared on the educational context of Kerala, the educational achievement of the sample was very poor due to high dropout at different levels of their schooling. In this study, it is found that the age at marriage of the respondents was directly proportional to education. As the age at marriage increased, the number of respondents who had access to higher class also increased. Illiterate women reported the lowest mean age at marriage (13.3 years) which is lower than the average age at marriage of the sample population. It was found that early marriage was a barrier to poor Muslim girls’ education in Malabar. The fear of the parents that they may fail to find a groom for their daughter if it is known that she has turned 15, force them to arrange marriages soon after girls reach high school classes.

One of the objectives of the present study was to find out the determinants of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in the rural areas of Malabar. Studies have shown that both economic and social aspects of the society reinforce the practice of early marriage of girls. The main determinants of early marriage have been listed into six. Based on the rank analysis it was found that according to the respondents, dowry was
the primary factor promoting the practice of early marriage among the Muslim girls in Malabar because the amount of dowry depends on the age of girls. If the girl is young, then the amount of dowry requirement will be much lesser at the time of marriage. Usually high dowry was required for the marriage of girls above 18 years and in order to avoid the payment of bigger dowry, parents try to marry their daughters while they are young. Thus it was found that dowry is an important determinant of early marriage.

Culture was found to be the second most important factor affecting early marriage. Among the rural poor Muslims early marriage is deeply rooted in the community’s tradition and social and cultural practices. Just like in several other Islamic societies, here also early marriage is recognized as part of the culture and they have a long tradition supporting early marriage as a custom. It was also found that since religious beliefs have profoundly influenced the culture of the community the religion also had great impact upon the practice.

Preference for younger girls in marriage was pointed out to be the third important factor promoting early marriage. It was found that regardless of the age and economic status of men, they prefer to marry young girls. Preference for younger girls is found to be the most important reason for the continuation of Arab marriages, a traditional marriage practice in the community, as poor parents financially benefit out of such marriages.
The preference for younger girls has pushed up dowry for older girls. Poor parents always have a tendency to marry their daughters earlier for lesser dowry. The lowest amount of dowry demand by a Malayali groom ranges from 10 to 20 sovereigns with a cash of Rs. 50,000/-. As a result parents find it more economical to marry off their daughters to men from other states who have no special demands. Recent origin of Mysore marriages is an example for such marriages, where grooms from Karnataka marry poor Muslim girls with less dowry. There has been an increase in the number of such marriages over the time.

In the Islamic world, polygyny is an accepted religious practice. In this study the traditional custom of polygyny was found to be the fourth important determinant of early marriage. According to Mondal (2005), even though polygyny is lawful it is never obligatory. It was found that the religious rules on polygyny has been subjected to misinterpretations in several ways and under strong patriarchy these rules get manipulated so as to make things work for the pleasure of men. As mentioned in previous studies, it was found that among the poor Muslims in the rural areas, the age-old custom of polygyny is fading out, giving way to ‘serial marriage’ whereby men take a second or third wife after divorcing the existing wife.

In a community marked by social and economic backwardness, poor parents often perceive early marriage as an economic survival strategy and in this study this was ranked as the fifth important determinant of
early marriage. A girl child is regarded as a liability for poor parents. Early marriage is perceived as a survival strategy by the family because it lessens one mouth to feed and removes the future economic burden resulting from her wedding expenses. It was found that parental anxiety towards safeguarding the chastity of daughters also promoted early marriage of poor girls and the practice is perceived as a way to protect girls from sexual exploitation and harassment before marriage. This was given as the sixth important factor promoting early marriage. Since the mean values of different factors (3.7860, 3.6880, 3.6200, 3.5080, 3.3780 and 3.0200) did not vary much, it can be said that the economic and cultural factors were equally important in perpetuating the practice of early marriage and were intertwined and overlapped with each other. It can be concluded that early marriage of girls is a form of gender exploitation that has been significantly influenced by the economic and cultural factors as accorded by Karl Marx and Vandana Shiva.

8.2 Early Marriage and marital violence

Often under the pressure of various factors parents want to safeguard the life of their daughters by marrying them at an early age. Most of the parents are unaware that early marriage is a form of sexual violence against girls or it is harmful and the consequences of early marriage are devastating and longstanding. Scientific studies have proved that young age at marriage significantly increases a young girl’s risk of ever
experiencing violence from the husband. One of the objectives of this study was to find out and analyse the dimensions of marital violence experienced by the victims of early marriage.

Violence from husbands occur in three dimensions; sexual, physical and psychological. Many researchers have reported that there is an elevated risk of girls being sexually exploited and harassed in early marriage. In this study also it was found that the respondents were highly vulnerable to sexual violence from their husbands while they were physically and mentally immature to carry out their adult roles efficiently. Of the three forms of marital assault experienced by the respondents, psychological violence was found to be the most occurring form. Although early marriage represents the most prevalent form of sexual abuse of female children, in the present study only 82.6% of the respondents admitted that they were the victims of sexual harassment within marriage. Others considered several forms of sexual violence such as marital rape or coerced sex without their consent as normal and inevitable part of marriage. It showed that due to the cultural influence respondents were not aware of the sexual abuse by husbands. Other major types of sexual violence experienced by the respondents included husbands’ demand to perform unwanted sexual acts and forcing to have sex with other people. The present study found that young age at marriage has increased the vulnerability of respondents to sexual
violence. That is among the respondents married at or below the age of 14, more than 86% had experienced sexual violence. It is a bit less among the respondents married at higher age (77.8%). As the age at marriage of the respondents increases, sexual violence decreases. Sexual violence against women can be attributed to the sexual objectification that women usually face in patriarchal societies. According to the sexual objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts, the socio-cultural background of the society plays a leading role in sexually objectifying the female body. This study found that the victims of early marriage were considered as the objects of sexual pleasure for their husbands and were sexually exploited.

As indicated in other researches, here also it was found that younger respondents of the present study have reported higher incidence of sexual violence within marriage. Among the youngsters 90.3% reported that they were sexually harassed by the husbands while only 52.9% of the older respondents reported it. Chi-square test revealed that the age at marriage and present age of the respondents were significantly associated with the occurrence of sexual violence inflicted by husbands in early marriage. Thus the hypothesis that ‘young age at marriage is associated with increased risks of sexual violence from husbands and young women still live in the horror of sexual violence’ was proved.
Analysis showed that 86.2% of the respondents were the victims of physical violence that included violent acts from their husbands like beating/hitting, kicking/dragging, punching with objects/weapons etc. As in the case of sexual violence here also it was found that the youngsters report higher rates of physical violence (96.2%). More than 86% of the women have faced psychological violence in their marriage in the form of verbal abuse, humiliation in front of others, controlling behavior and freedom and/or restricting movements in and outside the home and threatening with harm. Here also younger respondents have reported higher rates of psychological (90.9%) violence. In this context it can be assumed that the lower reporting of marital violence by older women may be due to their traditional approach to marital violence. The socio-cultural factors might have affected their disclosure of marital violence as they consider it as a private matter. Additionally older women might be subjected to recall bias as they had experienced violence when they were young. They might have forgotten incidents of violence as indicated by Yoshihama and Gillespie (2002).

According Basheer (2004), Muslims of Malabar is highly patriarchal and tradition bound. The social milieu is more male dominated and women have a very little say in social matters. Respondents mentioned that the role of a woman after marriage is that of a caretaker at home. A wife has to accept her husband’s authority and must be obedient and
submissive to him. It is men who are accountable to provide for their families and therefore husbands have the power to punish his wife if she disobeys him. Marital violence is very common and husbands resort to any means of violence to control and exploit their wives. During the discussions, all respondents mentioned that they were completely dependent upon husbands for livelihood as they had no job. They also mentioned that even though violence is substantial among married women, it is not considered as a problem in their community. So it can be said that violence against women was perpetuated by both the financial factors as suggested by Karl Marx and patriarchal culture as indicated by Wolfgang and Ferracuti in their culture of violence theory. The culture of violence perspective attributes violence that takes place at home to the level of acceptance of violence in the larger society. That is many acts of violence are accepted and in many ways encouraged by the culture. Since men are the providers, violence by husbands is viewed as an integral part of marriage and therefore it is accepted.

**8.3 Early Abandonment – A dreadful consequence of Early Marriage**

According to the report of a United Nations Children’s Fund study, early marriage is closely linked with wife abandonment. In this study all the respondents were abandoned by the age of 35 and abandonment can be considered as the culmination of the extreme form of violence against
Findings & Conclusion

A bandoned Muslim Wives – Victims of Early Marriage

a woman by her husband. So the study tried to find out whether there is any relation between early marriage and early abandonment. It was found that the mean age of the respondents at the time of abandonment was just 27 years. Therefore an attempt was made to analyse the association between early marriage and early abandonment. For that the age at marriage was analysed against the age at abandonment. Analysis showed that the respondents who were married at or below the age of 14 years were abandoned at an early age than those who were married at a later age. Of the 60 women who were abandoned between the age of 16-20 years, 66.7% were married at or below the age of 14 years. Among the respondents married at a later age (15-17 years) majority (33.8%) were abandoned while they were 31-35 years old. Thus it was found that as the age at marriage increases, age at abandonment also increases. Based on the analysis of the mean age at marriage of the two groups it was found that the respondents married at the age of 15-17 years had a higher mean age at abandonment i.e. 27.4 years compared to the respondents who were married at or below the age of 14 years which was only 25.8 years. It showed that the young age at marriage is related to the young age at abandonment of the respondents. The analysis of the present age and age at abandonment of the respondents revealed that the older respondents were abandoned at a lower age (26.1 years) than the middle-aged and younger women (27.5 and 26.9 years respectively). So it is concluded
that among the older respondents abandonment occurs a little earlier since majority of them were married at or below the age of 14.

The mean calculated for the age at marriage and age at abandonment of the sample were 15.1 and 26.8 years respectively. It indicated that the respondents had only a short period of marriage. In order to find out whether the low age at marriage has any influence upon marriage, an attempt was made to analyse the length of the marriage of the respondents. It was found that 15.6% of the marriages lasted only for less than 5 years. Only 32% of the marriages that ended in abandonment had lasted up to 15 years or more. The duration of marriage was found to be increasing with the increase in the age at marriage of the respondents. Among the respondents married at the age of 14 or below only 30.63% had been in their marriage for more than 15 years while 33.70% of the respondents married at the age of 15 – 17 years had more than 15 years of marriage. With the help of chi square analysis it was proved that there is a significant relation between age at marriage of the respondents and the duration of marriages (p<0.001). In this study older respondents had a shorter duration of marriage than the youngsters. While 52% of the older respondents had been in their marriage for less than 10 years there was only 39.8% younger respondents who were abandoned within 10 years. It may be because most of the older respondents were married at an early age. Percentage analysis showed a relation between the age at marriage
of the respondents and the duration of marriages. The Chi square test also revealed a significant relation between these two variables (p<0.001) and the hypothesis that ‘the younger the age at marriage, the shorter the duration of marriage’ was proved.

It was found that the highest duration of marriage was just 15 years that too only for 32% respondents. So this study made an attempt to find out whether the respondents ever had any kind of happiness within their short period of marriage. Analysis found that for 95.2% of the respondents the longest duration of happy marriage was barely up to 5 years or less. Only 4.8% of the respondents were happy in their marriage for more than five years. Even more noteworthy is that there were 10% who never had a happy marriage. Still they had been in their marriages up to five years or till abandoned by husbands. It may be because they might have tried to stick to marriage because of the cultural norms of the society that expects married women to be loyal to their husbands. So it can be concluded that the culture as mentioned by Vandana Shiva (1993) and economic dependency as indicated by Karl Marx and Engels (1846) may have made them to suffer violence and stick to marriage. That is, despite of facing severe abuse at husbands’ home, many respondents continued in their marriages for long since they had no other alternatives. Even though respondents tried to continue their marriage, all of them are
Chapter VIII

abandoned by the husbands because mostly it is men who leave their wives for various reasons with the support of culture.

Girls’ young age is often perceived as a desirable attribute for marriage and in many cultures early marriage is often perceived as the only alternative for girls. In traditional societies the socio-cultural factors have strong influence upon the attitude of the people towards early marriage. In order to examine the respondents’ perception about the practice of early marriage, an attempt was made to find out whether the respondents consider early marriage as harmful or not. Twenty statements were made including both positive and negative items and the respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to each statement. On the basis of the responses the total score for each respondent was calculated. The total score for each respondent ranged from 20 to 100. Based on the scores, the respondents were divided into three categories. The respondents who scored between 100 and 68 perceive early marriage as desirable, between 67 and 34 perceive early marriage as neutral and those who scored between 33 and one consider early marriage as undesirable. Analysis showed that in spite of being victimized by the custom of early marriage, a huge section of the sample still favour the ongoing practice. 37.4% of the women perceived early marriage as a desirable practice and supported it. Only 28.8% mentioned that early marriage is undesirable and it is harmful for girls whereas 33.8% of the respondents were neutral
about early marriage. It was extremely paradoxical that in spite of being the victims of early marriage, a significant percent of them favoured early marriage. It may be because of the cultural influence upon the mindset of women as accorded by Vandana Shiva. The percentage analysis showed that among the women who favour the practice 58.8% were married at or below the age of 14, showing that there is an association between the age at marriage of the respondents and their perception. It was also found that while older respondents (71.6%) have a traditional approach towards early marriage, younger respondents have a more progressive attitude towards early marriage. Only 25.8% of the younger respondents perceived early marriage as desirable. Further analysis showed a relation between the present age of the respondents and their perception about early marriage and the chi square test revealed that the relation between these two variables is significant (p<0.001). Therefore it can be said that younger Muslim women have a negative perception about the practice of early marriage.

Since younger women considered early marriage as undesirable further attempt was made to find out, whether they believe that early marriage is associated with early abandonment. Analysis showed that only 37% of the respondents were aware that early marriage can lead to early abandonment. It was pitiful to see that a considerable proportion of the respondents are unaware of the association between the two (32.2%).
Chapter VIII

Here also it was found that culture has significant influence upon shaping the outlook of the respondents. The response of the women reflected the influence of the patriarchal values upon them. It was found that among the women who said that early marriage can lead to abandonment, 61.4% were married at a higher age (15 – 17 years). Among the women those who did not find any association between early marriage and early abandonment, 53.5% were married at or below the age of 14 years. It was also found that among the older women only 20.6% mentioned that there is an association between the two. It indicated that majority of the respondents married at or below the age of 14 and older respondents, had a traditional view about early marriage and abandonment. Since the older women were well acquainted with the conventional life for a long time, they were likely to be bound by the tradition. They considered early marriage as part of tradition and tala’aq as men’s religious privilege. Even though the tala’q was not done according to the prescriptions by religion, they believed that men have the right to abandon his wife whenever he likes to do so. It is significant that most of the older respondents (71.6%) did not consider early abandonment as a negative consequence of early marriage. It may be because in the past abandonment was not considered as a problem because of the support given by the joint family system to the abandoned women. Such women were extensively encouraged for remarriage. More than that the
abundance of short term marriages (Arab marriages) usually had left a great number of women abandoned. So just like early marriages, abandonments were also considered as normal. May be because of this, the older respondents never considered it as problematic and their responses reflected the traditional patriarchal attitude of the community.

On the other hand it was clear from the analysis that the younger respondents were more aware of the consequences of early marriage and consider it as harmful for the well-being of girl children. Earlier it was found that, majority of the youngsters are against early marriage and pointed out the practice to be ‘undesirable’. Furthermore it was the same age group (61.3%) that mentioned that early marriage can lead to early abandonment. The percentage analysis depicted a difference in the respondents’ view about the association based on the age and the chi-square test also showed that the relation between the two variables significant at 0.001 level. Thus the hypothesis that ‘the young victims perceive early marriage can lead to early abandonment’ was proved.

Earlier analysis revealed that in Malabar, the rural poor Muslim women had been the victims of exploitation by their husbands. Even though all of them tried to continue in their marriage despite the sufferings throughout the marriage, their husbands abandoned them. So in this study an attempt is made to find out whether the respondents were aware about the exploitation in their marriage. In order to assess the
awareness of the respondents 20 statements were made including both positive and negative items. All the statements were explained to the respondents in detail and were asked to indicate the extent of their awareness against three options: A for ‘Yes’, B for ‘I don’t know’ and C for ‘No’. For positive items, ‘A’ was given a weightage of 3, ‘B’ was given a weightage of 2 and ‘C’ was given 1. Weightage to each option was reversed for all negative items. The total score ranged from 20 to 60. The respondents who scored between 20 and 33 were considered to be the ‘deniers’, respondents scored between 34 and 47 were denoted as ‘neutrals’ and the respondents scored between 48 and 60 were considered to be ‘aware’.

Deniers are considered to be those women who do not agree that women face higher risks of violence and exploitation when they marry younger or in other words, they do not believe that early marriage is a form of violence and exploitation of younger wives. For them early marriage is beneficial and desirable and therefore consider early marriage in a positive way. In the case of ‘neutrals’ they are not aware of early marriage as a form of violence towards girls. They do not have an opinion concerning matters on early marriage. Finally respondents who come under the ‘aware of’ category, are aware of the harmful impacts of early marriage in the life of young brides and do not believe that early marriage is desirable.
Results showed that as indicated by Heggen (1993), the patriarchal cultural value system has a strong influence upon the mindset of women. This was evident from the response of the women, because the deniers outnumbered the respondents who were aware of the exploitation in early marriage. Only 30.8% of the respondents were aware of the exploitative nature of early marriage while 33.4% were deniers who never considered early marriage as exploitative. The analysis based on the age at marriage, showed that among the respondents who do not consider early marriage as an exploitation, 73.7% were married at or below the age of 14. As the age at marriage increased, the number of respondents who were aware of exploitation also increased. The chi square test showed a significant relation between the age at marriage and awareness ($p<0.001$). The result was further verified with the present age of the respondents and was found that compared to the older cohort (13.7%), the younger respondents (62.3%) were aware of the exploitation in early marriage. The chi square test also found that the relation between the present age of the respondents and awareness is significant ($p<0.001$). Thus the hypotheses that ‘the younger women, are aware about the exploitation in early marriage’ was proved. The study found that violence against women is justified by the patriarchal stereotypes. Here the culture is being used as a tool to abuse women in all spheres of life as indicated by Shiva (1989).
Chapter VIII

Since the respondents of the present study are the abandoned Muslim wives who are the victims of early marriage, an attempt was made to find out what according to them are the factors leading to wife-abandonment in early marriage. The main factors were categorized into three: the culture of polygyny and talaq, dowry and women’s lack of power in early marriage. Based on the rank given by the respondents the mean was calculated for each factor. The culture of polygyny and talaq in Islam was ranked as the most important factor leading to early abandonment of Muslim women who marry early. As noted by Pohl (2010) in Islam polygyny is neither mandatory nor encouraged but merely permitted. The Koran’s conditional endorsement of polygamy stresses that self-interest or sexual desire should not be the reason for entering into a polygynous marriage because the original purpose of allowing this practice was to protect the social and financial standing of the widows and orphans in their community. As against this the present study found that men’s desire for younger girls for marriage is a major drive towards adopting polygyny. In India a Muslim man has the right to practice limited polygyny i.e he can have up to four wives at a time (Singh 2011). It was found that even though polygyny is an accepted practice, among the poor it is uneconomical to have four wives at a time. So they use ‘talaq’ to divorce the existing wife so as to marry a new girl. In fact, the age old custom of polygyny had almost disappeared in Malabar, instead of which
men practice serial marriages whereby they marry a new girl after divorcing the existing one. So it can be seen that more than polygyny, it is the ‘talaq’ that is being used for the abandonment and since talaq is an unrestricted customary practice more and more abandonment takes place.

Based on the analysis of the Mean the second rank was given to the practice of dowry. Respondents mentioned that dowry is crucial to the practice of early marriage of poor Muslim girls in Malabar. Earlier analysis showed that ‘less dowry’ was a major attraction towards early marriage. But usually after a few months of such marriages most of the dowry related problems arise and girls are send back to their homes for additional dowry. It was found that approximately for 80% of the respondents dowry harassment began within months of their marriage. Further analysis revealed that even though dowry was mentioned to be an important cause of abandonment, the underlying factor causing abandonment of Muslim wives was the religious privilege of unrestricted talaq given to men. This is because dowry harassment is common among people in all religions. But in Hinduism and Christianity, because of the religious restrictions the rate of divorce or abandonment is very low. But in Islam no such restrictions exist and therefore dowry related issues often end in talaq or abandonment. Here we can see how Levinger’s (1965) Social Exchange theory is applicable. Levinger cited religion as a barrier
to leaving the relationship. But here religion does not put any restrictions upon divorce, rather through the provision for talaq, promotes it.

On the basis of the Mean, the third important factor affecting wife abandonment was cited as women’s lack of power in early marriage. The young age at marriage signified girls’ inability to manage things that were out of her control. Discussion showed that the usual wide age gap seen in early marriages made women powerless at their husbands’ home. It was found that when husbands lose their interest in wives, they went after other younger girls. To marry a new girl, husbands simply abandoned their existing wives. Since the wives were powerless, they could not retain their husbands them and it ended in abandonment. Here again Levinger’s ‘alternative attractions’ is applicable in the form of ‘younger girls’ and ‘dowry’; the two major attractions that instigate men to look for other relationships.

8.4 Problems encountered by the victims of Early Marriage

Indian society has always treated divorced or abandoned women very harshly. Abandoned women have a very low status and are never treated in the same way as the widows. Problems faced by abandoned women are more acute. Therefore in this study an attempt was made to find out the present problems encountered by the abandoned Muslim wives who are the victims of early marriage. The study found that the respondents faced various problems at varying degrees. The major types of problems
they were facing at the time of the study were related to their financial, physical, psychological and social conditions. All the respondents belong to the rural lower class Muslim families in Malabar. They were not well educated and had few income generating skills. Financial difficulty was the most intense problem faced by the respondents (87.6%) in their present life. Women’s financial vulnerability reflected in their inability to satisfy the needs on food, household accessories, personal expenses, healthcare, education of children etc. Young age at marriage of the respondents was found to have increased their vulnerability to financial problems. Analysis showed that age at marriage is related to financial crisis faced by the respondents. Those who were married at a younger age (60%) had more financial problems than women who were married at a later age (40%). It was found that early marriage generates feminization of poverty and inter-generational poverty by extending poverty from mothers to their children.

As mentioned above, the financial problems lead to the physical and psychological problems of abandoned women. It was found that 93.6% of the respondents were suffering from one or the other type of health problems that included tiredness, often falling sick, dizziness, back-pain, gynaecological problems etc. Based on the age at marriage it was found that 86.3% of the respondents married at or below the age of 14 had severe health problems, while only 52.8% of those who married above the
age of 15 years mentioned about severe health problems. Intensity of the health problems varied among the respondents according to their age at marriage and the chi square test showed that there is a significant relation between the age at marriage and health problems (p<0.001). It was found that the health problems of the respondents increased with their age and 81.4% of the older women were suffering from severe health issues. Considering the psychological ailments, more than 95% of the respondents mentioned many types of psychological unrests which included symptoms of depression, stress, anxiety, guilt feeling and lack of self confidence. In this study it was found that the psychological problems of the respondents increased according to their lower age at marriage and older age. The respondents married at a young age (12 – 14 years) had severe psychological problems (81.7%) than women who were married above the age of 15 (59.7%). Among the older women 85.3% had severe psychological issues compared to 61.8% youngsters. The chi square test showed a significant relation between the present age and psychological problems.

Despite the advancement in the standard of living of the population in Kerala, the condition of abandoned and divorced women remains deplorable in our society. They are a vulnerable section of the society denied of their basic human rights due to the social and cultural milieu. In this study it was found that 91.6% of the respondents were suffering from
different types of social/familial problems including ill-treatment, lack of support, low social status, harassment and social stigma. The worst side of social stigma towards them was that the respondents had been treated as sexual predators starving for sex. 62.7% of the respondents who were married at a young age faced more social problems and it increased with the rise in the age. The chi square test showed that there is an association between the age at marriage and the present age of the respondents and social problems. It is significant at p<0.001 level. It was also found that the older women (83.3%) had more social problems than the younger women (69.4%). The analysis showed that the young age at marriage increases the susceptibility of women into various problems. Thus the hypothesis that ‘the lower the age at marriage, the higher the problems faced by the women in their later life’ was proved. Therefore it is evident that early marriage of girls can create several problems including the financial, psychological, health and social problems in their later life.

8.5 Suggestions and Recommendations

The present study found that in the rural parts of Malabar, especially among the lower class Muslims, early marriage and wife abandonment are common. During the field work, researcher could find more than two young women who were abandoned by their husbands within a single household itself. This itself tells us how crucial the problem is. Mere enactment of the law prohibiting child marriages is not enough. Much
more attention is required from the central and state Govt. authorities. Some suggestions are put forward for their considerations;

Early marriage gives the social sanction for the sexual exploitation of girls. Even though the age at marriage has been raised to 18 for girls through the Child Marriage Restraint Act – Amendment 1978, the age for consent remains 15 years as mentioned in the Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code. Therefore sexual intercourse of a man with his wife of above the age of 15 is not considered as rape under the penal law. It is strongly suggested to raise the age of consent for marital consummation into 18 years which would help in preventing the practice of early marriages.

Enforcing registrations regarding marriage and birth would greatly help in controlling the practice of underage marriages. Ensure the registration of all births to verify the age of a girl at marriage and registration of marriages to ensure compliance with the law, to ensure security under the law and to verify that the marriage is neither temporary nor false.

Creating mass awareness about the negative consequences of early marriage. Govt. should implement strategies for community mobilization to resist the practice of early marriage. It should start with the youth, their families, influential persons in the community like community and political leaders, feminist activists etc. The Governmental and non-Governmental authorities should conduct awareness raising campaigns
Findings & Conclusion

among the people to generate awareness about talaq and also develop ways to intervene directly within individual cases – medication, referrals, support for victims – providing free education, job, shelter, rehabilitation centres etc. Introduce special package for the victims of early marriage so as to rescue them from going into prostitution and to ensure that they are not misused.

Provide girls with viable alternatives to early marriage. Providing alternatives to girls include increasing their accessibility to vocational education and providing training to improve their life skills especially if they are out-of-school. They must be given a second chance to continue their education.

Encouraging female education by investing in poorer, rural areas can prevent the occurrence of early marriage to a great extent. But the practice cannot be eradicated only through education rather it would be possible only through bringing a change in the attitude of the society towards girl children and early marriage. A society’s attitude is mainly shaped by its culture. So a cultural change through community sensitization by educating the present generation should be brought, in order to change the existing situations, which will take time.

Strengthening and enforcement of child marriage laws and the registration of marriages would help to reduce the practice of early marriage. Training law enforcement officials on child marriage laws and
their duty to enforce laws regulating it is highly recommended. It is also suggested to levy penalties on violators. At the same time communicating details of the law and punishments for breaking them should also be carried out through a public education campaign.

Through anganwadi workers awareness can be created among the community about the health impacts of early marriage upon girls and their children. Ensuring the involvement of fathers, mothers and community leaders are crucial to these efforts.

Since divorces are customary, the religious clergy must ensure the rights of women in all respects including her rights to maintenance from husband. As husband should pay maintenance after divorce and the agreement should be made in advance if he wants to divorce his wife.

More studies can be carried out at least once a year by the Govt. or NGOs, especially in Malabar areas to find out the seriousness of the problem and can also monitor the occurrence of the underage marriage of girl children.