

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND IMPACTS OF MYSORE KALYANAM

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in Nilambur Grama Panchayath of Malappuram District of Kerala State. 15 Case studies were included in the study. In this study the term 'Mysore Kalyanam' means the specific type of interstate marriage in which the brides from poor socio economic background and belong to rural remote areas of Malappuram district of Kerala are married to bridegrooms who are residents of Mysore (Karnataka State) and demand comparatively lesser dowry. The women involved in Mysore Kalyanam face traumatic life experiences like poor life situations, domestic violence, negligence, economic dependence and finally desertion. The study depicts the impacts of over significance in marriage in women's lives. It reveals the social backwardness of a specific community. The suggestions based on the results of the study emphasize on the remedial moves on dowry, women's education, skill training, economic independence and gender sensitisation.

Marriage and family are considered as the two main spheres of women's lives, generally. This thought thus normalises the violation of women's human rights in the inner space. Social institutions, literature and social norms fetishise the role of women as 'mother' and 'wife'.

According to Ballard (1870) woman's chief discontent is not with her political, but with her social and particularly her marital bondage. This type of evolution of women's life is interpreted by Oakley (1985), as she defines the process of socialisation, which makes the men "masculine" and the women, "feminine". Through the process of socialisation, the societal norms are being hardened and normalised within the society.

The various agents of socialisation teaches the male to be strong, independent, active, assertive and dominant while the female to be soft, dependant, passive, fragile, and suppressed. Thus women begin to enter the interactions of human relationships with "learned helplessness".

This makes them dominated by the other sex, in all spheres of possibilities of human life by the controlled mobility, security, and rights on reproduction and property (Bhasin 2003).

In Kerala, the dowry system has become a strong custom in all castes, classes and communities within the past two three decades... According to Eapen and Kodoth (2002), the rights enjoyed by women of matrilineal societies in early Kerala might have been converted into dowry. By the patriarchal interpretations, it became the men's right and legitimised practice. The patriarchal ideology bestows on men the power and authority over women's lives.

Malappuram District, with the lowest marriage age in Kerala state, having home deliveries even now, with the high prominence of adolescent marriages, low higher education facilities and still high population growth rate, now catches the attention because of the interstate marriages in its specific regions.

The study of Mahila Samakhya Society (2008-09) on Status of women in Nilambur Gramapanchayath of Malappuram District, highlights the issue of dowry as a major cause for interstate marriages (Mysore Kalyanam) and the subsequent desertion of women by their husbands. Once a girl reaches the age of twenty, she is considered as overage for marriage, which demands too high dowry for an alliance within the state. Hence the parents are compelled to take the painful decision to marry their daughter to the neighboring state with comparatively lesser dowry demands and send her to a totally strange, far-off place. Women in inter-state marriages will have to face serious problems like unfamiliar language, culture, poor life situations, economic dependence and domestic violence. Being not capable to face the social stigma of having an unmarried daughter in home, the parents are ready to go any length to get a daughter married.

Even after experiencing these painful life situations, the married girls never get any security from their husbands or in laws. Most of them are treated brutally with violence. A few numbers of girls are living with their husbands fighting a life at the strange place with strange language and customs. Most of them are deserted, but not legally divorced and get nothing for their survival. So far no scientific studies have been conducted on the event of interstate marriage to Mysore, its specific features, causes, and impacts. It was under these circumstances that the investigator, decided to conduct a study to explore the socio cultural background of Mysore Kalyanam and its gender issues. It also explores the consequences of Mysore Kalyanam in the lives of the deserted women, her children and family.

Operational Definition of key concepts

Mysore Kalyanam : In this study, the term Mysore Kalyanam refers to the specific type of interstate marriage in which the brides from poor socio-economic background and belong to rural remote areas of Wayanad or Malappuram districts of Kerala are married to residents of Mysore (Karnataka State) who demand comparatively lesser dowry. **Socio-Cultural Background**: The details regarding education, income, community etc. of the respondents and her family members and the significance attached to the institution of marriage.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the features of Mysore Kalyanam that occurs in specific regions of Kerala state.
- To assess the socio cultural background leading to Mysore Kalyanam
- To study the impacts of Mysore Kalyanam
- To investigate the gender issues involved in Mysore Kalyanam

Methodology

Case study method was used in the study. The sample consisted of 15 women respondents from Nilambur Gramapanchayath of Malappuram District who were married to Mysore earlier but now live separated from their partners in parental homes. The sample was selected by snow ball sampling method. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data. It consists of questions covering all areas of the objectives of the study. The open ended questions were helpful in motivating the respondents to reveal their true experiences at the spousal family in an entirely different society. The collected data from the interviews with the respondents and their family members was analysed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

1.Features of Mysore Kalyanam :-

According to the results of the study, Mysore Kalyanam has some common features. Comparatively low dowry persuades the poor families to Mysore Kalyanam. The prevalence of low marriage age (14-18) in the specific area considers the respondents as over age for marriage. Then they cannot get a suitable alliance from the neighborhood. All the respondents transferred their residence to Mysore were they had the bitter experiences of starvation, lack of basic amenities, lack of personal freedom, barrier of language and brutal domestic violence.

2.Socio-cultural background leading to Mysore Kalyanam :-

The over importance of marriage in women's lives plays a crucial role in the issue. Low educational status and low family income are found to be the common status of the respondents. All respondents belong to Muslim community. Everyone was fully aware about the consequences but was helpless to reject the marriage. The lack of resources to combat with the social backwardness holds an important role.

3.Impacts of Mysore Kalyanam:-

The respondents and their children depend on parental families for survival. Children are not getting sufficient facilities for their education and are having emotional problems. On the other hand the parental families are helpless with their poor earnings to support the daughters and grandchildren. But they do not consider this type of marriages as unfair since to get a woman married is of utmost importance.

4.Gender issues involved in Mysore Kalyanam:-

No consideration was given to the women's educational aspirations. Inter-state transfer of residence and barrier of communication make their lives miserable. The traumatic experiences faced by the women in a strange place, strange customs and traditions along with a strange language are violations of basic human rights. The societal norm of 'protector' (male partner) and the 'protected' (female partner) legitimises the domestic violence. Patriarchal construction of womanhood closes the doors of self expression, decision making power and right over their own body and choices. All these human rights violations are being normalised.

Discussion

The specific features of Mysore Kalyanam as revealed from the study make it a strange but unique event happening in the state of Kerala which is famous for its women development indicators. The over significance of marriage channelises women's lives from an independent human life with dignity to a passive one of mere obedience. The girl children are being socialised from the early childhood to be good wives and mothers.

In the present Indian scenario, almost all marriages face the issues of dowry, domestic violence and emotional problems. But with the barrier of language and unfamiliar social conditions, the effect of such problems becomes severe in these relationships. Historical backwardness of Malappuram district is reflected in every aspect of Mysore Kalyanam. The social backwardness of the specific community to which the respondents belong also plays a crucial role. The lowest marriage age coupled with the over importance of marriage in a girl's life pave way to this unfavorable social practice. Marriage is reckoned as the ultimate aim of women's life and the husband is supposed to be 'the protector'. This norm legitimises all the human rights violations of women.

The patriarchal construction of womanhood closes the possibilities of women. In the parental family she's considered as a liability while in married life only as a sex object. The gender role stereotypism decreases a woman's space. The globally sanctioned sexual and reproductive rights are not considered as women's rights within the ideology of patriarchy.

The study reveals that most of the respondents have no awareness about the legal procedures regarding divorce and compensation. All the women in the sample and their parents had the expectation of the worst ; even then they were compelled to comply with the situation of Mysore Kalyanam. The social stigma associated with an unmarried woman is as much strong in our society that even though she may be deserted in the future, the relief is, she has been legally married and has got children legally itself.

Though there are researches highlighting the strides made by Muslim community in the field of education, the present study points out the fact we have miles yet to go as there are several pockets in the Malappuram District of Kerala where higher education is a distant dream for many women. They are even forced to drop out from school for the sake of marriage. Lot of awareness generation is required in which the initiatives taken by the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Calicut needs special mention.

Conclusion

The study depicts the over significance of marriage in women's lives. It reveals how the marriage moulds women's lives to the only possibility of being wives. The social backwardness and societal norms do not give her any other sphere. The patriarchal ideology insists the norm and lack of resources help it to grow. Women's human rights violations are thus being legitimised in Mysore Kalyanam and the event gets repeated.

The study is expected to develop interest among researchers for similar studies. Since marriage is considered as the main goal of woman's life, and there are similar other type of interstate marriages like Mali, Mangalore, and Haryana Marriages occurring in different places of Kerala, the experiences narrated in this study can be applicable for all these interstate marriages with regard to their causes, features, gender issues and impacts on human lives. The study is hoped to be an eye opener to the grave situation of rural women which remain unnoticed in certain pockets of the state.

Suggestions

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions are being put forth to prevent the occurrence of Mysore Kalyanam as existing today and to minimize the negative consequences of interstate marriages.

- The commercialisation of marriages should be defended by people's participation. Local self governments , activist groups and religious interventions can sharpen the campaign theoretically and practically.
- The negative impact of dowry system should be emphasized.
- Higher education and vocational training of women should be promoted , with financial assistance and reservation.
- 100% of the victims belong to Muslim community. The social backwardness of the specific community should be addressed politically.
- All marriages should be registered with relevant information of the parties, and transactions if any.
- Information about Jagratha Samithi (Panchayath level Grievance Cell) should be given to all.
- The victims, who seek help, should be given free legal aid and rehabilitation facility.

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