

Gender, Emotion and Technology: Mapping the Lived Experiences of the Left-behind Wives in Northern Kerala

A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of

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IN

STUDY OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE POLICY

BY

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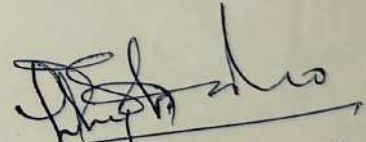
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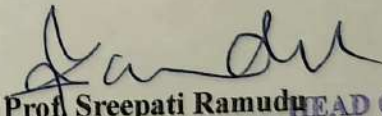
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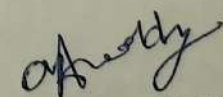
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My Ummachi....

*Whose warm embrace comforted me in the walk of life...
Whose devoted and intuitive prayers guided me along the path of wisdom ...
Hailing the spirited support and undying love that kept me sane throughout....*

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List of Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
B. Com	Bachelor of Commerce
BBA	Bachelor of Business Administration
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CD	Compact Disc
CDS	Center for Development Studies
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
EE	Emotional Energy
EMI	Kerala emigrants
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IET	Intergroup Emotions Theory
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KMS	Kerala Migration Survey
LDRs	Long-Distance Relationships
LP	Lower Primary
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NHG	Neighbourhood Groups
PSC	Public Service Commission
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RSA	Repressive State Apparatus
SHG	Self-Help Group
SMS	Short Message Services
SSLC	Secondary School Leaving Certificate
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
VHSE	Vocational Higher Secondary Education

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Chapter-1

Introduction

Situated in the socio-cultural context of northern Kerala, this study focuses on the Left-behind wives¹ and their lived experiences during the time of the intensive migration of Muslim men. It highlights the socio-economic mobility and social opportunities enjoyed by the Left-behind wives in the absence of their partners. It also showcases the challenges and difficulties that they face with the proliferation of modern technology. Viewed from the perspective of social inclusion, this study highlights the ‘agential’ status of the Left-behind wives in social life, despite the economic independence and social opportunities that they have in the absence of their husbands. It critically analyzes the simultaneity of the process of economic liberalization and the process of exclusion or marginalization of the Left-behind wives. The research progresses with a qualitative investigation into the independence and autonomy of the Left-behind wives in terms of their social mobility.

I focused on the various cultural elements that went into the making of the notion surrounding the positionality of the Left-behind wives in Kerala society whilst identifying their locations of vulnerability amidst the minority Muslim community in the backdrop of various factors that foster the patriarchy visibly and invisibly. Focusing on ‘Home cinema,’² I attempt to explore the conceptions regarding the Left-behind wives in society and their alleged extramarital affairs depicted in the media. Utilizing the lens of the sociology of emotions, I have reviewed the

¹ In this particular study, I take Left-behind wives to be the wives of the Gulf migrants who are staying behind in their home town while their husbands are working abroad, specifically in Gulf countries. I am focusing on the cases of the Muslim community in the districts of Malappuram and Kozhikode in this study. Since the beginning of migration literature, the term ‘Left-behind wives’ and ‘Gulf wives’ have been used to refer to the wives of migrant men. Thus, throughout the dissertation, I use the words ‘Left-behind wives’ and ‘Gulf wives’ interchangeably.

² The digital revolution at the turn of the century sparked a local film tradition in northern Kerala known as “Home Cinema,”; also known by the terms- “Home Video” and “Home Film,” (Karinkurayil, 2019). In certain ways, the word ‘Home cinema’ signifies a transitional period between television and film. “Home Cinema of Kerala is locally produced low-quality CD/DVD video productions which are full-length feature films distributed through video shops, stationeries, bookstores and so on.” (Karinkurayil, 2019, p.30). In the early 1990s, a group of young people in Malabar came together to start the home video movement. Salam Kodyathur, Siddique Kodyathur, Banna Chennamangalloor, Razak Vazhiyoram, and others were among the first to produce a home video for the Malabar mass market. ‘*Ningalenne Branthanaakki*’, a two-hour film, was the first successful home cinema. The achievement of the home cinema movement is those permanent followers who eagerly await the release of a new film. Currently, the home cinema industry has progressed to the OTT level, with the ability to release directly on YouTube (Musadhique, 2016). See more in Musadhique, K.P. (2016). *Cultural Practice, Performance and Identity: A Case Study of Mappilas of Malabar* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) and Karinkurayil, M. S. (2019). The Islamic Subject of Home Cinema of Kerala. *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 10(1), 30-51.

previous scholarship on Left-behind wives. The perspective on emotion is used to look into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives and their families. The study explores the increasing intimacy in distant relationships and the emotional connectedness as a result of the proliferation of communication technologies in the twentieth century. The communication technologies have a vital role in the transnational relationship of migrant husbands and Left-behind wives, resulting in our transformation into ‘techno-human beings.’

A close connection between migration and technology in the thesis is elucidated by examining how migrant husbands utilize technology like smartphones, tablets and surveillance cameras to establish their emotional connection, including sexual gratification with their wives, as well as to observe and put them under surveillance at the same time. Following this, the study maps out the determining role of modern technology in producing ‘mediated patriarchy’³ in the social life of the Left-behind wives and enquires into the power structures and relations of migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives in a liberal economy. The negotiations, contestations and everyday forms of resistance of the Left-behind wives in a highly digitalized society where technology mediates the patriarchy is also focused upon. In sum, the study about the Left-behind wives provides new academic insights by situating it within the regional space of Malabar⁴ (northern part of Kerala) in a highly digitalized world.

1.1. Context of the Study

The study on migration is not a recent development, with its far-reaching implications for all civilisations. The country’s structural, economic, and cultural transformations have been impacted by the same. Joseph (1998) takes note of the beneficial accounts of the migration for the migrants and society in general, implying the sending and receiving countries. The effects of Gulf

³ I use the concept of ‘mediated patriarchy’ to denote the various communicative mechanisms which produce and strengthen the patriarchy in a virtual world. I have used this following the concept of ‘mediated communications’ proposed by Antony Giddens. This refers to the “idea of husbands continuously communicating with their wives via both emotional and instrumental calls and messages, wherein the calls and messages are meant to be micro-coordination, so as to know the daily engagements of the wives and family, and, to know how they are doing at home” (Jahan, 2021, p.150).

⁴ The northern part of Kerala, known as Malabar, is the most Muslim-populated region in Kerala. This region consists of five districts; Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Palakkad. In this thesis, with the term Malabar, I intend to talk about the districts, Kozhikode and Malappuram specifically.

migration have penetrated practically every family in Kerala, resulting in implicit and explicit changes in their culture, attire and culinary experiences (Ashraf, 2018). The Gulf migration has influenced the Kerala economy and culture in an extended form, especially the *Mappila*⁵ Muslims. The statistics denote their higher emigration into Middle Eastern countries. In comparison to the last half of the twentieth century, gulf migration has brought enormous changes in terms of sociological, religious, cultural, educational, and material aspects. According to a survey conducted by Zachariah and Rajan (2012), Kerala emigrants (EMI) living abroad in 2011 are estimated to be 2.28 million, up from 2.19 million in 2008, 1.84 million in 2003, and 1.36 million in 1998. Remittances to Kerala from overseas in 2011 were anticipated to be Rs. 49,695 crores, up from Rs. 43,288 crores in 2008 (Zachariah & Rajan, 2012).

The 1930s and 1940s signalled the beginning of the transition of migrational revenue in Kerala, with many Indian families being employed in international labour scenarios. The Persian Gulf was a favourite hub of migrants from Kerala during the 1930s, even before the initiation of the oil industry. Migration was a common phenomenon among Keralites, notably among the Muslim population from northern Kerala, due to the commercial relationship with other regions, even before the 1930s. Panikkar (1929) noted that, far before the advent of Islam, Arabs had deep commercial ties in the Western seaboard of India, especially the Malabar Coast. Kerala benefits from the global maritime trade due to its broad coastal lines. The warm spices on the Malabar coast have always grabbed the attention of foreign merchants. As a result, Kerala occupies a pivotal place on the ancient world's commercial map. Muzarris⁶ was one of the world's most significant commercial centres, and it was a crossroad where the East and West collided (Ashraf, 2018).

A.P. Ibrahim Kunju (1975), a prominent historian, observed that Malabar had substantial marine trading links with West Asian countries from the beginning, and the Malabar coast's

⁵ Muslims of Kerala, especially in Malabar region were known as Mappilas. The term denotes a '*great child*', by combining two Malayalam words, '*Maha*' (great) and '*Pillai*' (child). The same term is used to address Christians and Jews, but they were differentiated as 'Nasrani' Mappilas as well as 'Jonaka' Mappilas. The origin of the term is still debated. Miller (2015) notes that Mappila culture is an outgrowth of a successful marriage of Malayalam and Islamic cultural traditions. As the oldest Muslim community in South Asia, their way of living has evolved through more than thirteen centuries. Mappilas come under the OBC category as per the Indian government caste classification. For more details, refer to the writings of Kunhali (2004); Logan (2000); Innes and Evans (1951) and Miller (2015).

⁶ Muziris (Ancient Greek: ο, Malayalam: Muchiri, probably identical with mediaeval Muyirikode) was a Malabar Coast, ancient harbour and urban centre originated during the 1st century BC.

exposure was primarily due to a favourable geographical component. The Arabs, the first traders in the Indian Ocean, enjoyed a pleasant and amicable relationship with the local kings in Kerala. They were warmly welcomed by the local Hindus. The Arab-Kerala commercial relationship served as a platform for the expansion of Islam in the Indian subcontinent (Hassan, 1928). According to Ilias (2007), “Malabar was a fulcrum of world trade and a meeting point of western and eastern trade routes. Islam, of course, had made headway in this more liberal ambience of trade” (p.437). Islam encourages people to travel and trade, following its prioritization of knowledge acquisition. An Arabic poem titled ‘*A Call to Travel*’⁷ (See Appendix-1), penned by Imam Shafie⁸, talks about the benefits of travel and incites everyone to do the same.

Many believers have travelled around the world while adhering to Islamic traditions and principles. A short visit to any cemetery or burial ground (*Khabarstan*⁹) of Muslims in Kerala brings in a significant number of *Khabar*¹⁰ of people from various nations, specifically from Arab nations. Prange (2018), explores travel as a fundamental theme in the book. Beginning with a story on a voyage around the Arabian sea, Prange’s work attempts to comprehend the creative activities that went into knowing Kerala’s distinctive forms of Islam, assisted by politics and trading contacts. Ilias (2007) further mentions that:

Arabs had close trade ties with the Malabar Coast even before the birth and spread of Islam in the 7th century. Islam’s rapid spread, however, fostered it tremendously. Kerala’s relations with the Middle East stretch back to the period of the Bible. The first trace of it dates back to the Old Testament. The commercial expansion of Arab merchants and traders across the Indian Ocean to Malabar,

⁷<https://shariahweb.wordpress.com/2013/05/25/a-call-to-travel-a-poem-by-imam-imam-as-shafiee/>

⁸Imam Al-Shafieis, one of the four major Imams of the Sunni schools of law. He is also the author of a number of notable works in the discipline. He is known as ‘*Nasir al-Hadith*,’ which translates to “defender of hadith.” Imam Shafie received his education from experts in Makkah, Madinah, Kufa, Basrah, Yemen, Syria, and Egypt. His teacher gave Al-Shafie authorization to issue judicial judgements(fatwas) when he was fifteen or eighteen years old. Imam Shafi used to make decisions based on the principles of Imam Malik when he was younger. He has also spent a significant amount of time studying under one of Imam Abu Hanifa's major students. Imam Shafi, on the other hand, was incredibly respectful of the perspectives of previous great Imams. He wrote almost a hundred books, including *Kitab al-Umm*, *Al-Risalah*, *Al-Imla*, *Ikhtilaf Al-Iraqiyani* and *Ikhtilaf Al-Hadith*.

⁹*Khabarstan* is a Malayalam word used to denote a burial ground that is commonly used by Muslims in Kerala. The majority of burial grounds are located near mosques, and the majority of these sites are obtained as *Waqf* property (*Waqf* means the permanent dedication by a person professing the Islam of any movable or immovable property for any purpose recognized by Muslim laws as religious, pious or charitable).

¹⁰ An Arabic word to denote graves

however, is historically recorded only from as early as the 3rd century and got augmented, when Persians conquered the Middle East. Arab mariners by then had crafted a trading network that extended all the way from the port cities of the African Coast to the great emperor of South China. They are considered to be the pioneers and, in all possibility, were the carriers and merchants of the Indian Ocean before anybody else (Vincent, 1943, 62). (p.439)

With a long and enriching history, emigration and immigration are not a recent phenomenon in Kerala. Looking at the backdrop of migration and trade in Malabar, Ilias (2007) argues that Malabar is a major trading port in the ancient and mediaeval Indian Ocean. Likewise, this location served as a meeting point for four major civilizations of the time: Perso-Arabic, Southeast Asian, Indian, and Chinese. Malabar's relationship with the Arab world's seafaring people dates back to the first century AD when diverse cultures were in regular interaction and exchange with one another. What happened in the Gulf States reverberates throughout Kerala and vice versa. The migrants' conduct and way of life were heavily influenced by the Gulf countries, with a particular inclination towards clothing and cuisine¹¹. Their socio-political interests and discourses are heavily laden with the gulf touch (Ashraf, 2018).

The 1970s wave of migration of workers from India was potentially directed towards the Middle East, especially towards the oil-exporting countries bordering the Persian Gulf (Gulati & Mody, 1983). Several push and pull factors played a pivotal role in triggering the *Malayalee* migration from this region. It is generally believed that poverty, lack of employment opportunities, high population density, rapid population growth, and lack of industrialization acted as catalyst forces along with budding urbanization and a high rate of literacy in these peculiar Kerala regions. The psycho-social outgoing outlook along with which Keralites are brought up is one of the major reasons why they outnumber other Indian states in terms of gulf emigration. Kerala's active gulf ties remain unaffected by the global economic recession due to its robust migrant remittances (Zachariah & Rajan, 2011). Every industry of activity is occupied by migrants from Kerala who end up making a significant impact on the economic growth of middle eastern countries (Rahman, 2010).

¹¹ Public acceptance of Arabian cuisines like Mandi, Shawaya, Al-Faham, Kubboos, Kababs among Muslims especially, and, Arabian names for restaurants and shops in Malabar specifically, and, dress like Purdha among Muslim women has been the impact of the gulf on Muslims in Malabar.

Kerala has successfully transformed itself into an integral part of the Gulf region spatially, constitutionally, economically, socially, and culturally (Ashraf, 2018). Needless to say, this results in large-scale remittance inflows to the state GDP, especially from Middle Eastern countries, which further stimulates economic activities in Kerala (Parameswaran, 2011). There is also an increasing trend of migrant outflow from Kerala. Parameswaran (2011) focuses on cash remittances, tourism, export and credit availability. RBI (2010) records show that “during 2008-09, private transfer receipts, comprising mainly remittances from Indians working overseas, increased over the previous year” (p.570). The present Kerala economy is strongly supported by this external income. Kerala was able to survive the global financial crisis due to the cash remittance from abroad. Most of the available studies point to the dependency of Kerala society on foreign remittances as sources of income (Mathew & Nair, 1978; Prakash, 1978).

The second half of the seventies witnessed migration to the middle east, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Sharjah, Muscat, and Kuwait. The low education level and severe unemployment in their home countries forced them to work as construction workers and hotel workers, including waiters, military helpers and drivers in the emigrant countries. The majority of the migrants have the inclination to spend the remittance on building, repairing and renovating new houses, investing in land, and for marriage ceremonies (Gulati & Mody, 1983; L. Gulati, 1983b; Mathew & Nair, 1978; Prakash, 1978). The migrant households equate their prestige and social status with the expenditure on marriage. The luxurious houses and the extravagant marriage ceremonies are the byproducts of the migration. The construction of new houses also led to anomalous price inflation for the material of construction work and the workers’ wages. It is to be noted that all these add to the changes in the lifestyles of the people involved, which is to be read on par with the intersecting factors that make up their respective lives.

The elderly members of the family that I interviewed mentioned about two types of categorical classifications among high-class people. The first is hereditary high-class or traditionally well-off families, and the second is those who became high-class due to foreign income, mostly referred to as the ‘*Puthan panakkars*¹²’. The marriage market doesn’t consider the newly rich on par with the traditionally well-off families, resulting in a belittling stand towards the

¹² Malayalam word (colloquial usage) to denote the people who became rich through foreign remittances/gulf money.

former. Rags to riches stories revolving around the Gulf migrants successfully toppled the historical supremacy of the ‘*Tharavadu*’¹³ lineage (Ashraf, 2018). The Gulf migration has helped to mitigate the stratification based on inherited status, despite the transfer of social rank and power through the generations in Malabar.

Kerala has quite a long history of migration. As of November-December 1977, a total of 1.35 lakh Keralites were employed outside the Indian subcontinent (Eapen, 1979). Gulati & Mody (1983) note that India has transitioned into a major exporter of labourers to the Middle East. In recent times, there has been an increase in the number of persons seeking employment abroad, specifically from the northern part of Kerala. A significant period in the history of Kerala has experienced severe unemployment due to the lack of skill and education, which prevented a huge population from earning a job in rural Kerala, consequently leading to the migration to Middle Eastern countries in search of employment opportunities (Eapen, 1979). Poverty, unemployment, low pay and lower standards of living in India prompted many Indians to emigrate to the Gulf in search of active economic chances (Azeez & Begum, 2009). Gulati and Mody (1983) highlight the growth in Indian remittance inflow, the implications of the same on the country’s economy, the various rules and processes in India for both labour export and payment inflow and the long-term analysis of migration’s prospects.

The 1970s brought a paradigm shift in the socio-economic conditions of specific regions in Kerala due to the enormous number of immigrants to the Gulf countries, resulting in a lot of attention to the state of Kerala (Azeez & Begum, 2009). The revenue of migrant-dominated settlements grew massively. Every community and village were impacted by the Gulf migration in one way or the other. The social, economic, demographic, political, and religious standpoints of Kerala are incessantly shaped by migration (Ashraf, 2018). The migration to Gulf countries has significantly changed the socio-economic condition of the Malayalee Muslim population. According to the Kerala Migration Report, 53.7 per cent of the households in the state have at least one migrant in the same district (Zacharia & Rajan, 2015).

In the context of large-scale migration from Kerala to the gulf, I have tried to locate the lives of the Muslim Left-behind wives, on whom the impact of migration has been felt in several

¹³ Malayalam word to denote ancestral home

ways. There is a significant impact of gulf migration in Kerala which is reflected in the various economic parameters, including considerable alleviation of poverty, educational excellence and unemployment, thereby contributing to a notable improvement in the quality and standard of life. Substantial changes were made in the consumption pattern, savings and investment of the emigrant families. Numerous studies emphasize the role of foreign remittance in the economy of Kerala and portray the statistical data regarding the inflows on the economy. Studies so far have limited themselves to the social development of migration, thus downplaying the issue of exclusion caused by migration at socio-psychological and individual levels. Rather than exaggerating the outweighed sources of information, this research extensively focuses on migration in terms of married women in Kerala who are compelled to live apart from their spouses and also takes on an investigation into the socio-cultural-technological aspects of the same.

These studies provide a plethora of data regarding the remittances that go into the making of the economic development of Kerala and the challenges faced by the migrants, based on primary data collected from migrant households. Existing studies do not dwell much into the information on the wives of those Gulf migrants, their agential status in society, prejudices held against them and their resistance in day-to-day life. I have located the current study in this very context. It would also look into the drastic changes that occurred in these Gulf wives' relationships, lifestyles, and communication, with a particular focus on the technological boom. Giri & Darnhofer (2010) states that research by various scholars on migration mostly focuses on the aspects like - understanding the structure and drivers of migration (Graner, 2001; Kumar, 2004), the economic role of remittances (Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme & Wyss, 2005) and on migrants' networks (Rigg, 2006). The socio-cultural effects and impacts on the communities of origin, as Hadi (2001) and Biao (2007) say, have not been studied extensively.

Locating men as the primary protectors in the family in the public sphere, Khaled (2002) and Kaspar (2006) emphasize how the widespread out-migration of men has impacted both the household and community significantly. They tried to point out the dual role played by the Left-behind wives, where on the one hand, they have to take care of the household tasks traditionally performed by women and, on the other hand, the necessity to play the traditional masculine roles in the social sphere. In a nutshell, the studies so far have more or less focused on the socio-economic repercussions of the migration from Kerala, with special reference to the Muslim

community, and have tried to analyse the dynamics of migration and fluid engagements among this particular community (Mohammed, 2007). The relevance of this study extends beyond the exaggerated aspects of migration that were smoothened out after conveniently ignoring the subtle elements of the everyday experiences and struggles of the Left-behind wives and their consequent resistance.

1.1.1. Statement of the Problem

In the field of social science study, the Left-behind Muslim wives of Kerala take on greater significance in the light of how society perceives them. The ways in which their identities have been constructed need to be questioned in view of the exclusionary practices that they encounter. In order to explore the pathways that explicitly and implicitly reinstate patriarchy, it is crucial to concentrate on the various factors that contribute to the formation of their identity, particularly by focusing on the social and cultural dimensions. I will be examining the stereotypical perceptions around the group with a particular focus on how they are portrayed in the media, including films, literature, and 'Home cinemas.' There is a need to critically engage with the 'extramarital relationships' portrayed on the aforementioned mediums.

The absence of husbands, coupled with the moral obligations and social expectations placed upon women, puts them in a vulnerable emotional position where they are forced to deal with the complexity of their own selves. They are pushed into an existential crisis by the distrust and surveillance of society seeping into the fabric of their everyday existence. This question of crisis will also be a subject of the current study. It is crucial to discover how technology and devices contribute to the further disempowerment of the Left-behind wives in Kerala when they become subject to surveillance. In this situation, evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary devices and technology becomes necessary.

While acknowledging the positive contributions made by technology in enhancing the relationships between husbands and wives, the researcher also sheds light on how these technologies end up serving as a tool in the perpetuation of virtual patriarchy and gender violence. It is crucial to consider the effects of the technology's double-edged sword as used by migrant husbands to keep a close relationship with their wives, particularly in the gratification of their sexual needs, as well as to track their whereabouts and put them under scrutiny of surveillance. Many people's lives have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The wives who are left-behind

are hardly an exception. The sociology of emotion framework is used in the study to further explore these effects. Further, the researcher aims to uncover the coping strategies used by this community to get through these specific instances in their everyday life. Locating their efforts to challenge the perception of self that was imposed on them by the rules exalted by the misogynistic society and the concurrent development of their own spaces among this exclusion is significant from a social and cultural perspective.

1.2. Research Questions

The following central questions are addressed by this research:

I. What are the cultural practices that construct the notion of the Left-behind Muslim women in the Kerala cultural context? What are the cultural components that implicitly and explicitly reinforce patriarchy? What is the stereotypical perception of the Left-behind wives in the community and extramarital affairs as shown in media such as films and literature, with a focus on ‘Home cinema’?

II. Through the perspective of the sociology of emotion, how can we understand the lived experiences of the Left-behind wives who are living between the subjective emotions and objective norms? What are their emotional experiences during the absence of their husbands, and how is the complexity of a self, which is emotionally vulnerable and morally bound with social norms, simultaneously? How can we understand the experiences of the Left-behind wives who are undergoing an existential crisis by becoming an ‘object’ of suspicion by society in their day-to-day activities?

III. How can we understand modern technology and its communication mechanism in a nuanced way with regard to the life of the Left-behind wives? What are the positive and negative experiences of the Left-behind wives with regard to modern technology and devices? Despite the positive role played by technology in strengthening the bond between the wives and the husbands in the physical absence of the latter, how does technology perpetuate virtual patriarchy and gender violence? How do the migrant husbands use technology like mobile phones and CCTV cameras to maintain a strong relationship, including sexual gratification and to monitor their wives’ movements and put them under surveillance simultaneously?

IV. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the lives of the Left-behind wives when viewed from the lens of the sociology of emotion? And, given the above elucidation of the everyday life of the Left-behind wives, what are their contestations and strategies? In other words, how do the wives cope with their lives in the rapidly changing modern digital era, and how do they define themselves under the norms and rules of the misogynist society and engage meaningfully with the exclusionary spaces whilst producing their own active social and cultural spaces?

1.2.1. Objectives

1. To analyze the social construct of the Left-behind Muslim wives in Kerala society.
2. To theorize the experiences of the Left-behind wives through the perspective of the sociology of emotion.
3. To map out the role of modern technology in the production of the power relations between the migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives.
4. To examine the coping mechanisms employed by the Left-behind wives and their everyday form of resistance.

1.3. Conceptualisation of Gender, Emotion and Technology

This research is about the lifescape of Muslim married women, specifically the wives of gulf migrant husbands in Northern Kerala. Almost all prior kinds of migration literature have addressed little on the wives of migrants and their experiences resulting from their husbands' migration. In both international and Indian contexts, only a few qualitative studies explore migration's impact on women, including in Kerala. In the context of Kerala, CDS¹⁴ (Centre for Development Studies)

¹⁴ The Centre for Development Studies (CDS) is a self-governing institution noted for its research in applied economics and themes related to socio-economic development, education, and training programmes. It was founded in 1970 by the late prominent economist Professor K.N. Raj. The Kerala government and the Indian Council of Social Science Research provide the Center with the majority of its funding. Endowment units for research in specific areas have been established at CDS by the Reserve Bank of India and the NITI Ayog (previously the Planning Commission of India). The Union Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has set up a migration unit at CDS to look into concerns surrounding foreign migration from India. The Governing Body, which is made up of academicians from all around India, is in charge of running CDS.

has done numerous works on migration and its implications on the socio-economic and cultural status of the Kerala society and the emigrant's family.

Kurien (2002) observed in her study that Gulf migration had an impact on the state as a whole and that the state appeared to be dominated by robust rampant consumerism. Foreign commodities, formerly perceived as exotic and elite, have become widely available and were regarded as necessary for maintaining a basic position in society. Consumer durables such as vehicles, televisions, music systems, refrigerators, and other electric types of equipment have seen a surge in popularity. Many pieces of research on the usage of remittances suggest that remittances are primarily used for conspicuous purchases and an opulent lifestyle among the emigrant's family members (Prakash, 1978; Mathew, 1978). Prakash (1978) also adds in his study that some people have investments such as land, apartments, restaurants, and other enterprises. Nambiar (1997) and Zachariah et al. (1999) shared a similar opinion. They also observed that remittances are used for everyday household spending, commercial construction and maintenance, land purchase, loan repayments, life cycle rituals, and kids' schooling. Migrant households in Kerala are at the forefront of conspicuous consumption and restructuring houses, with a diverse choice of commodities and high consumption levels (Munira Beebi, 2012). This consumption culture is incredibly found among the Muslim population in Kerala society (Zachariah et al., 1997). The majority of Kerala's emigrants to the Arab world are Muslims, hailing from the coastal districts of Trivandrum, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur, and Kasargode (Nayyar, 1994). Thus, it shows that the Muslim community's quality of life has improved; it is one of the evident benefits of migration noted by Zachariah et al. (1997). The Muslim community used a significant proportion of their remittances to meet living expenses.

According to Zachariah et al. (1997), the first and most obvious effect of the remittance inflow had been a tremendous increase in consumption in Kerala, and the proliferation of posh Gulf mansions has symbolised this. Prakash (1978) holds the same view and, in his study "Impact of Foreign Remittances: A Case Study of Chavakkad Village in Kerala", analyses how much cash they send home and how these remittances affect household income, consumption, savings, and investment. A significant amount of money has been invested in land and houses. The rising demand for land has resulted in a threefold increase in land prices over the last five years. He also notes that people who live in migrant homes report a "quite high level of consumption."

In the view of Nair (1986), most Keralites see migration as merely a means of increasing their income, and they believe that the Gulf States provided an immense opportunity for thousands of illiterates and unskilled people to earn and save a large amount of money that they would not have been able to accumulate in their lifetime. The cash sent out to Kerala is invested mainly in household maintenance, paying off debts, buying property, buying home appliances, and lavish spending on wedding ceremonies and other festivities. The typical trend of remittance usage is seen in Gulati's (1983b) study. According to her, house construction and reconstruction have been identified as high investment priorities for migrant households. Within five years of the worker's migration, one-third of the households had built new homes. Another 20% had repaired and rebuilt their homes within that time frame.

Several studies show that mass emigration not only resulted in economic and consumerist expansion among Kerala Muslims; but also exhibited socio-cultural and educational mobility among Mappila Muslims. Sabira (2000), in her study of the educational impact of Gulf migration in the Malappuram district, has revealed that Gulf migration has a positive impact on the educational mobility of migrant families. Gulf migration, particularly among Muslims, promotes upward educational mobility for both boys and girls, at least up to the secondary level. Mohan (1990) also observed that migrants desired a good education for their children. They had no objections to spending money on this, and special English medium residential schools were established in Gulf pockets. Parents from migrant families show more willingness to give financial contributions to the private schools back in Kerala.

All of these studies (Kannan & Hari, 2002; Kurien, 2004; Mathew, 1978; Nayyar, 1994; Prakash, 1978; Pushpagandan, 2003; Zachariah et al., 1997) focused on analysing the flow of migration and utilisation of remittance, as well as their impact on the socio-economic and educational growth of the home economy. It is common for people in Third World countries to migrate long distances searching for employment, and there are many studies on that. However, the majority of these studies missed the multifaceted worldwide effects of this migration boom, specifically the experiences of Gulf migrants' wives. Even the early migration experience is nothing but the male experience (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Women started to migrate in the mid-twentieth century, although migration research largely ignored them (Pedraza, 1991). There has been increasing research on gender and migration in the recent two decades, although much of it

has focused on women who migrate (McEvoy, 2008; Pedraza, 1991). Generally, gender and migration is a topic that has received little attention, and it did not consider a fundamental constitutive dimension of migration (Mahler & Pessar, 2006).

Hadi's (1999) study on the impact of international migration on Left-behind women's status in rural Bangladesh found that adult males' overseas migration had a substantial positive relationship with women's decision-making capacity and girls' schooling in migrant families. The practice of dowry in marriages has decreased because of remittances and the influence of secular ideas; women's status in traditional communities has changed. In addition, it emphasises the economic independence of those Left-behind wives, as well as the improvement in the migrant family's standard of living due to the inflow of remittances. The majority of the studies on migration and its effects on women emphasised women's autonomy, decision-making authority, and other positive outcomes. According to research from Mexico (De Snyder, 1993; Radel & Schmook, 2009), Morocco (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2004) and Bangladesh (Hadi, 2001), women have more decision-making power, division of tasks, and independency due to their husbands' migration. In addition, women have started to engage in major agricultural activities in rural areas (Gordon, 1981; Boehm, 2008).

In a study of Turkish women, Abadan-Unat (1977) discovered that women who stay at home have more decision-making power, particularly in nuclear families. Because there is no elderly male member in the home, the Left-behind women are forced to communicate with organisations and institutions they have never engaged in previously, such as banks and government agencies. Migration has a positive impact on women's status since it encourages the formation of nuclear homes, which boosts women's roles and economic independence. Yabiku, Agadjanian, and Sevoyan (2010) have taken a synonymic approach. They claim that men's labour migration in rural Mozambique is linked to women's increased autonomy, as assessed by their freedoms in the areas of mobility, consumption, production, and health. Increases in women's autonomy are frequently assumed to be desirable; however, Mason (1987) points out that women's autonomy or position must always be viewed "in relation to men" (p. 720).

In another study, using the cross-sectional household survey dataset, Karymshakov & Sulaimanova (2017) investigated the impact of migration on women's occupational choices, working hours, and time use in Kyrgyzstan. Left-behind wives have to take over jobs that the

migrant household member previously did, and this impact could help women gain more power in the long run. Due to household member migration, these women are more likely to engage in self-employment activities. However, some scholars expressed a contrasting view in this regard. Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) considered the effect of male migration on women's participation in the labour force in Nepal, finding that women in migrant-sending households work less in the market. Mendola and Carletto (2008) found that having a migrant member from their household reduces women's paid labour supply while increasing their unpaid employment in their study of the influence of migration on the labour supply of left-behind family members. In the rural areas of Mexico, Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006) show that increases in remittances diminish women's labour supply in informal and unpaid activities.

Most international studies on migration found that migration can positively and negatively impact women. In the study on Moroccan Left-behind women, Sadiqi & Ennaji (2004) claim that the situation of Moroccan Left-behind women is complex and sometimes paradoxical. This new situation empowers these women while disempowering them due to their social situation and lack of resources. Some of these women, particularly newly married women, remain at home and are burdened with the responsibilities of feeding the family, upholding family honour, and raising children. Male migration has increased women's duties and responsibilities in general. Croll & Ping (1997) note that women's workload has increased as a result of male migration, as has the division of labour, particularly the feminisation of agriculture. De Snyder (1993) made a similar claim in the case of Mexican Left-behind wives. According to him, Left-behind wives are not only forced to stay at home without their husbands but are also expected to do various duties, all of which are incredibly stressful. In addition to their conventional roles as wives, mothers, homemakers, and caregivers, these women are expected to assume the roles of financial provider, administrator, head of the household, decision-maker, etc. De Snyder also noted that these women are dissatisfied with their additional responsibilities, and also, he has commented on the socio-cultural milieu in which these women live.

Brink's (1991) study prompted me to deal with the autonomy of the Left-behind wives, which is a result of their husbands' migration, as well as the extent of these wives' economic independence and decision-making authority. According to Brink, the significant decision regarding their family life and marital life was still made by husbands and obeyed by women. In

many situations, male relatives or in-laws made the decisions rather than women. The extent to which women's decision-making authority shifts is influenced by factors such as where they live and when they are in their reproductive cycle. Some women may become disempowered as a result of migration because they are overdependent on others.

Migration that creates a type of dependency also brings in the element of emotion to the platform. There is a need to understand the various literature on the sociology of gender and emotion to comprehend the lifeworlds of the Left-behind wives. I attempt to review the existing scholarship on the literature on emotion and gender to map its connections and departures from the object of its inquiry and see why it is necessary to draw up a different standpoint to deal with the subject.

The article entitled 'Facial Appearance, Gender, and Emotion Expression' (2004), written by Ursula Hess, Reginald B. Adams, Jr., and Robert E. Kleck, mainly an experimental study, annulled the perceived emotions of men and women by underlining the gender stereotypes. It evaluated the stereotyped gendered emotions which emerged out of socialisation that ended up influencing the emotional expressivity of women and men. The stereotypical view of emotions perpetuates the perceptions associated with men's and women's emotionality. The study probes the influence of social norms and roles in the making of stereotyped female-male displays of emotion. Through the three experiments using statistical tools, this study exposed the substantial role of social context in the stereotyped emotional expressivity of women and men.

Brody (1997) makes an effort to trace out the stereotyped emotions and emotional expressivity of the binary sections in society. The study argued that the emotional display of women and men varies according to their culture and their histories of socialisation. After reviewing several articles regarding the stereotypes about gender differences in emotional expressivity, the author argued that men are prone to more aggression and women prone to more affiliation (Birnbaum, 1983; Briton & Hall, 1995; Fabes & Martin, 1991; Lyons & Serbin, 1986; Swim, 1994). These gendered stereotypes act as a looking glass and showcase the fixed behavioural patterns and assumed socio-cultural and economic roles. This study disregards the significance of contextualisation in the construction of emotion of a specific gender. The role of socialisation history, gender roles and power in the making of the emotion of a specific gender was stressed in the later studies (Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005; Doell, 2013; Hess et al., 2004).

Brody (1997) also looks into the relationship between women's expressivity and interpersonal social relationships. Interpersonal relationships have played a vital role in women's emotional delivery, and thus the situations related to power played a crucial role in men's emotional outbursts. According to Brody, men are more expressive in the circumstances related to autonomy. Situations related to the power play a vital role in the emotional expressivity of men; both are mutually allied.

Brody discussed the appraisal and functionalist theories of emotion to analyse the impact of the 'gendered role' in emotional expressivity. The emotional expression of men and women is based upon the gender roles which have evolved from the cultural patterns that vary from society to society. According to Brody (1997), "power and status imbalances between men and women may affect both the way they appraise situations, as well as which emotions are adaptive for them to express" (p.386). Here, the author fails to specify that everybody examines the situations in relation to the status and power which is entrenched in gender, religion, educational qualifications, class, and other socio-cultural and political affiliations. Lastly, the author rightly noted the erroneous stereotypes and their negative impact on women's and men's behavioural patterns.

David Matsumoto's (1990) study among Americans and Japanese college undergraduates, who are different in terms of expression and perception of culture. Emotion with respect to its specific expression, comprehension and interaction is perceived differently by the American and the Japanese population (De Vos, 1960; Doi, 1962; Matsumoto, 1990). The study used statistical research methods to analyse the differences between display rules and actual emotional expression. It used six universal emotions: happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, fear, and anger, to decipher the display rule rating of facial stimuli using Ekman and Friesen's (1978) FACS (Facial Action Coding System) in various social situations. This research pointed to a significant limitation related to the cross-cultural study that different cultures interpret each depiction differently. This paper provides a theoretical framework that predicts cultural differences in display rules based on individualism-collectivism, power distance, and social distinctions such as in-groups-out-groups and status.

Here, the author emphasises that culture is a socio-psychological entity, not a geopolitical entity. While analysing the impact of social distinction of in-group and out-groups in emotional expressivity, certain studies noted differences in emotional expressivity based on various social

distinctions. Social distinctions like in-group and out-group and the status of the subject also lead to fluctuations in emotional expressivity.

Robin W. Simon (2004) traces the emotionality of men and women in the United States of America with the help of two sociological theories of emotion (Hochschild's normative and Kemper's structural theory) and gender (functional and structural theories). It looked into the role of cultural beliefs in the emotionality of women and men. Hochschild's theory also supports the functional theory of Parson, which claims the existence of gender-specific emotional beliefs and different emotional predispositions in women and men. In contrast to that, Kemper's structural theory emphasises the subjective feeling of women and men. Moreover, the structural theory focuses on the person's status and role, which help to arouse specific emotions in situations. In any social relationship, people with high status and power would always get positive emotions (happiness, security), and people with low status receive negative emotions (fear, sadness and anger). According to Parson's structural theory, women's and men's expressive behaviour and subjective feelings are defined by cultural beliefs that exist in the said society. Parson argues that Durkheim's division of labour also attributed specialised roles to each gender, which aided in the holistic functionality of society.

The next article, 'Gender and Culture Differences in Emotion' written by Agneta H. Fischer, Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera, and Annelies E. M. van Vianen Antony S. R. Manstead (2004), is a report based on the analysis of cross-cultural data on gender and emotion across thirty-seven countries of the world. This study also referred to many articles that depict the powerful and powerless distinction of emotion among women and men and the gender-specific pattern of emotional expressivity (Brody & Hall, 2008; A. Fischer, 2000; Manstead, 1992; Shields & Shields, 2002). The authors mentioned that some studies noted the impact of hormonal changes on the gender-specific pattern of behaviour (A. H. Fischer, 2000; Frey & Langseth, 1985; Vingerhoets et al., 2000). But Wood and Eagly (2002) forwarded a biosocial approach, which emphasised the gender-specific pattern of behaviour influenced by social roles and social arrangements in society.

Thoits (1989) discusses the general theories of emotion and empirical findings of the research they conducted and reveals further possibilities in the field of emotion. By conducting the micro (socio-psychological) and macro (structural-cultural) level analysis, the author specified the possibilities in the realm of emotion among human society in relation to the innate nature of

affective attachments and behaviour commitments. Thoits (1989) used the phrases ‘Feeling rules’ and ‘display rules’ to denote emotion norms and expression norms, respectively. These two rules control the range, intensity, appropriateness and duration of the emotional expressions. The author emphasised the relationship between social structure and emotion norms whilst talking about emotional interactions, cultural beliefs regarding emotion, emotion culture and emotional socialisation processes. Scheff (1988) points to the “conformity- producing functions of shame” and suggests that people supervise their behaviour and thoughts by attempting to think from another person’s perspective\position. Emotions are produced according to the norms of expected conformity in society.

The rupture created by the distance, in terms of various emotional factors, got a new medium with the advent of technology and ICT. The role of technology in redefining interpersonal dynamics requires further scrutiny. However, most of the research discussed above took place before the twentieth century; therefore, they do not have much to speak about the impact of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) on the lives of Left-behind wives. In fact, some of the studies ignored the impact of communication technology on their lives. However, hardly a few researches have looked into the impact of ICT on Left-behind wives. Zheng and Lu (2021), in their work, “Does ICT Change Household Decision-Making Power of the Left-behind Women? A Case from China,” investigates the impact of male spouse migration and ICT on ‘left-behind’ women’s household decision-making power. The findings revealed that ICT facilitated gender equality within families and led to more powerful family roles for Left-behind women, even though these studies missed the negative impacts of virtual technology.

Much of the other existing studies on ICT have focused on transnational families, not specifically on Left-behind wives. The growth of information and communication technology and new media landscapes have brought into question the notion that close relationships necessitate face-to-face interactions (Baldassar et al., 2016). Baldassar (2007) looked into the transnational family connections between adult migrant children in Australia and their relatives in Italy. In a transnational family, the study discovered the endurance of emotional attachments over distance and the maintenance of mutually supportive interactions across time and space. Wilding (2006) also shared a synonymic approach, finding that ICTs help to sustain transnational relationships and create a feeling of transcending time and space, contributing to a sense of intimate closeness.

The majority of families perceived this ability to connect as increasing the overall quantity and quality of contact. Also, the advent of ICT into people's daily life has allowed them to feel "connected to home" and family despite distance and time.

Madianou and Miller (2013) propose a revolutionary theory for understanding new media and the nature of mediated interactions in their book *Migration and new media: Transnational families and polymedia*, which is based on a long-term ethnographic study of migrant mothers and their children who remain in the Philippines. Email, instant messaging, social networking sites, webcams, and texting have revolutionised how transnational families communicate across long distances. To generate a sense of co-presence, a migrant mother can now call and text her children, who are left behind multiple times every day, surf social networking sites and leave the camera on for 12 hours. Madianou and Miller (2011) also present a historical perspective on Filipino transnational families' communication. It becomes evident that the media do more than just convey and distribute information; their nature and materiality play an important role in mediating interactions. All of these studies emphasise the role of ICT in transnational families; however, none of them focuses on the wives of migrant men; consequently, I seek to address that gap by examining the impact of ICT on the lives of Left-behind wives.

When it comes to the literature on the Indian context, male migration has mostly increased women's obligations and tasks, as it has in other countries. In India, there has been very little research on the impact of migration on families and left-behind women. According to studies, male out-migration provides possibilities for women to take on new roles and gain new skills, transforming gender relations and enhancing women's empowerment (Connell, 1984; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Desai and Banerji (2008) studied the impacts of spouses' migration on the lives of Left-behind women, focusing primarily on two aspects of women's lives: first, women's autonomy and freedom over their lives, and second, female workforce participation. Male migration may be linked to a higher possibility of remittances, and women may be needed to fill in for absent husbands in a variety of ways, such as responsible for pet care and working on the family farm or in the family business (Jetley, 1987; Paris et al., 2005). Desai and Banerji (2008) also claim that women who live in extended families do not have these additional responsibilities or privileges, but women in nuclear families have more responsibilities and complete authority.

Ganguly and Negi (2010) made a similar observation as Desai and Banerjee, who emphasised the importance of household structures in the lives of Left-behind wives due to male out-migration. They say that the lives of Left-behind wives fluctuate greatly depending on the type of household structure they live in. Women in non-nuclear families have less power to make decisions. On the other hand, women in nuclear households frequently make their own decisions or make them with their spouses. However, the decision regarding the huge household expenditures, visiting friends or relatives, and monetary dealings of Left-behind wives are made by husbands.

A study by Kaur (2020), reveals that women's jobs and responsibilities increased dramatically as a result of their husbands' migration, and women saw these new roles as a burden. As part of these increased responsibilities, women acted as the head of the household and executed all family decisions. This shift in gender roles also causes conflict among the Left-behind wives, leading to an identity crisis, even though male domination and patriarchal norms still persist in Punjabi society.

In their study, Roy and Nangia (2005) offer a distinct perspective; it is primarily a comparison study among the spouses of migrants and non-migrants in Bihar, revealing that Left-behind wives are more likely to be stressed and experience sexual morbidity symptoms. It does not benefit the health of Left-behind wives; instead, it increases their risk of emotional stress, STDs, and HIV infection. Left-behind wives must endure physical and mental stress for meagre economic gains, and they embrace it as their fate and a necessity for the survival of their families. Also, the majority of the Left-behind wives said they had frequent headaches as well. Headaches were substantially more common among Left-behind wives.

Singh (2018) emphasises both positive and negative impacts of men's overseas emigration in her work "Impact of Male Out-Migration on Women Left-behind: A Study of Two Villages in Uttar Pradesh." Higher financial and decision-making autonomy, women's empowerment, increased remittance money, and increased expenditure on health, education, and agriculture are all positive effects. Strenuous responsibilities; concerns about the future and children's studies; outstanding debts; insecurity and extramarital affairs; children's health problems; emotional distress; household disharmony; sexual abuse, both verbal and physical abuse within the family and society, are all negative aspects.

According to Lei and Desai (2021), wives' health is impacted by husbands' out-migration. The added burden of animal care harmed the health of Left-behind wives in nuclear households. Left-behind wives in extended families, on the other hand, did not experience the health consequences of animal care because the duty was shared. In addition, the wives who got low remittances suffered health consequences. Furthermore, due to unequal gender dynamics and female seclusion, the absence of husbands in India may have a negative impact on women's health compared to other nations with more egalitarian gender norms.

Only a few pieces of research on the lives of Left-behind wives have been conducted in the Kerala context. Irudaya Rajan and Zachariah (2008b) note that married women with migrant husbands account for roughly 15.6 per cent of the entire households in Kerala, and they estimate that about 1.05 million wives are away from their husbands, the majority of them being Gulf wives, presumably Muslim. Leela Gulati (1993) has done significant work on the experiences of Left-behind wives, and she notes both positive and negative dimensions. As part of the positive dimension, she has noted that in the absence of husbands, women's overall status rises since they have more money to spend as they choose, have more freedom of movement, and can make autonomous decisions about their children's education, as well as the type of treatment they will receive if they become ill. In addition, men's migration significantly reduces women's invisibility, enhances mobility, and connects them to a broader network of institutions than they had access to previously. As a result, they gain more self-assurance and take on additional responsibilities. Some even engage in revenue-generating initiatives.

On the other hand, Left-behind wives have to take on additional responsibilities due to their husbands' migration. Even in terms of decision-making, the study found that the decision to emigrate is a joint effort in which women play an active role. The study also demonstrates that the Left-behind family is dependent on close family members, other relatives, acquaintances, and neighbours during the husbands' migration time; this dependency changes based on whether the children are young or adults. However, the age and gender of the children were not mentioned in this study, and I believe that looking at the gender and age of the children will provide a fuller view of this dependency. Moreover, this study has no reference to communication technology because there was no impact on the proliferation of communication technologies among Left-

behind wives during the period of her study. Thus, my study becomes relevant in that context, and I analyse the impact of virtual technology on the lives of Left-behind wives in northern Kerala.

Munira Beebi (2012) conducted a sociological study on the wives of Muslim Gulf migrants in Malabar who were left behind by their husbands to emphasise the impact of Gulf migration on the Left-behind wives from two perspectives. One is the immediate influence of Gulf migration on family life structure, housing status, and women's economic, educational, cultural, and social standing. Second, is the indirect or hidden impact of male migration by examining the adverse outcomes, added responsibilities, mental strain, and the psycho-social impact of male migration on the Left-behind wives. The additional obligations caused them numerous difficulties. They experienced mental tension and strain as a result of the negative experiences they had. It causes emotional hangovers in a few cases. However, the type of residential pattern in which women live has a strong link to their psychological disorders.

Additionally, the study noted the utilisation of modern technology like cell phones and the internet on women's easy communication with their husbands. Also, she mentioned that the tremendous advancements in mobile and web technology had shortened the distance between them and their spouses and made their relationship with them more intimate. Despite the fact that this study primarily looked at the positive aspects of modern technology, such as the intimate connection beyond distance, it overlooked the negative impact of modern technology on the lives of Left-behind wives in the digital era. As a result, my research attempts to fill the gap in this context by examining both the positive and negative impact of virtual technology on the lives of Left-behind wives, examining the experiences of Left-behind wives through the lens of the sociology of emotion, and analysing the women's experiences from an intersectional perspective.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

While being primarily informed by a feminist perspective, intersectionality as an analytic tool helps us locate the production of knowledge around particular subjects through the ambit of various variables like gender, caste, class, sect, religion and ethnicity. The intersectionality also prevents the second-hand treatment of the above-stated factors. An equal weightage is given to all those factors in the process of analysis in such a study. In this research about the Muslim Left-behind wives in the districts of Kozhikode and Malappuram in Kerala, I am following such a

method. In the following part, I will primarily deal with the theoretical framework of intersectionality embedded within feminist scholarship.

Looking through the perspective of intersectional feminism, categories like 'gender' and 'woman' cannot simply refer to a single unified entity; all women possess class, religion, socio-economic background, and other characteristics, and their experiences as 'women' vary as a result of those variants. While focusing more on the experiences of the Left-behind wives and their lifeworld by using in-depth interviews, this study contributes to an epistemic creation of the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala. Most previous researchers seem to have not considered the Left-behind wives' experiences from a feminist perspective, especially from an intersectional one; instead, they have taken the experiences of men as the experiences of 'humans' from a neutral way, like Harding (1987) argues that "traditional social research has been for men" (p.8). The majority of women's epistemology has been historically discounted, dismissed, or ignored in favour of men's epistemology. By using the lens of intersectionality, I aim to deconstruct the androcentric understandings pertaining to the studies on the Left-behind wives in northern Malabar by validating their narratives and lived experiences.

Originally 'coined' by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality as an approach to understanding the lived reality of society has taken academia by storm, providing a stringent critique for ignoring the multiple factors that trigger subordination, discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion of specific categories or communities. Although academia sees intersectionality originating from Kimberly Crenshaw's work, the theoretical lens of intersectionality existed way back. Going beyond the coining of the word, Kimberly institutionalised intersectionality in the records. This specific section of my thesis takes the understanding of intersectionality derived from the work of Patricia Hill Collins and Silma Bilge in their 2016 work titled, *Intersectionality*. Collins and Bilge (2016) describe the same as follows:

A way of understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, people, and human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organisation of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p.2)

Toying around the six core pillars of intersectionality, such as social inequality, power, relationality, complexity, social context and social justice, Collins and Bilge (2016) urge us to read it on par with the matrix point of interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural and structural. While looking at the matrix of culture, one cannot downplay the role of home cinemas in portraying the category of the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala. The portrayal of promiscuous Left-behind wives has tarnished their social image, thereby leading to the imposition of negative prejudices and stereotypes regarding them. Furthermore, the question of navigating through the power structures of family, marriage and kinship makes it all the more daunting. Their unequal social standing further accentuates it.

The fact that most of the Left-behind wives are dependent on the income sent by their husbands who are working in the gulf adds more complication, whereby the women are forced into an unequal position in terms of a wealth gap that is gendered in nature. The importance of finance in maintaining the independence of womenfolk is a known fact. The women depending on their husband's income, ends up creating an unequal power relation among the couple, which can be found well in their interpersonal relations. If one goes on to break down this interpersonal into subjective nuances, one can identify the role played by emotion and technology in the lives of the Left-behind wives. While going through the narratives of respondents, one can see how technology acts as a double-edged weapon in the lives of the Left-behind wives, paving the way to their subjugation or subjective liberation. Modern technological devices like CCTV, mobile, internet and various other applications like Instagram, Facebook, BOTIM¹⁵, WhatsApp and Snapchat provide a mechanism to keep an eye on the movement of women folk. This further acts as a mode of restriction through surveillance and resultant disciplinary dictums.

The patriarchal structure lends unequal power to the male counterparts compared to the female ones, going to the extent of the former interfering in the latter's agency. The husband-wife relations within the family structure thus provide more impetus to the husbands regarding the control of the power. This power within the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship affects multiple aspects of life, including restriction and decision-making, often crossing the boundaries

¹⁵ BOTIM is an application for free HD video calls, and voice calls over 2G, 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi connection. – for encrypted chats and calls.

of individuality and privacy, for that matter. One should not focus on the reductionist domain of the structural. This structure encompasses various elements like family, kinship, marriage, religion, media, etc. Surrounded by the dictums of culture to the obligatory performance of norms, mores and gender roles, the Left-behind wives suffer in the domains of mobility, movement and thought. The newly emerging infrastructure of technology, which enables the surveillance of these women, provides the fodder for **mediated patriarchy**, a new form of patriarchy, which I shall further explain in chapter four of this thesis.

Reiterating the aspects of structure, one should understand how it ends up enabling and restricting the subjects in this study. One should be wary of the said category's cultural, social and economic positions before jumping to any further conclusion. Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this topic in the section on attire in the fourth chapter to demonstrate this point.

Understanding the significance of the social context is of paramount interest to a researcher on any topic, as it provides the platform for discerning the subject in depth. For the purpose of this study, I have meticulously gone through the history of the northern Malabar Muslims, including the particulars of migration and the dynamics of the community living there. Religion and culture dominate the mainstream perception of this field. Going on to further problematise the lives of the Left-behind wives, one should be able to comprehend their origin correctly. The subject of the Left-behind wives in the particular context of this study is closely related to the migration of men into the Middle East from the beginning of the 1970s. Getting a migrant for a son-in-law and husband was a matter of prestige and social status during those days.

Conversely, this status of being a migrant's wife comes with its pros and cons. The pros are the status and financial security, and the cons involve difficulty in staying away from their respective partners. The husband in question being away leaves these women in a very precarious situation in the eyes of society. The spirit of the communitarian life adds to it in terms of the 'moral' obligation of 'keeping an eye on the neighbour, for their safety.' A woman staying away from their partner raises the casket of suspicion in society, and any fallout from her side, knowingly or unknowingly, even in cases where she is innocent, problematises her location in society. It is in this same context that I have based my study, and looking at this study without knowing the history will not help to understand it holistically.

One cannot look into the aspect of intersectionality without mentioning relationality. It brings out the links between the happenings in the field, explaining how the parts come together

to form a whole. Here relationality helps us to understand how multiple aspects like culture, gender, family, power, social standing, kinship, religion, media etc., come together to undermine the positionality of the Left-behind wives. It also helps us to comprehend how power relations are mutually constructed. Going further, relationality helps us to identify how the resistance practised by the Left-behind wives originated and was executed. This forms a complete whole where one cannot understand the other without looking into the entirety of the matter. One can further identify this complexity while unearthing the layers of lived experiences that these womenfolk go through.

These women strategically deal with the intensity of power struggle within the family structure by taking help from their children. One can locate the resistance in their daily lives, in their quest for justice, when they resort to covert strategies to tackle the power play on display. How do the Left-behind wives negotiate with the question of social justice? How they address and deal with the complexities of their lives is very significant. There are situations where they prefer taking their children, brother or someone from the family to dodge the prying eyes of disapproval while going out or while staying back late. The resistance in everyday life can be analysed upon a closer inspection on many such occasions. The question of different justice for each gender remains entangled in the structure. The complexity of this entanglement can be understood only when we analyse their lives through the multiple layers of exclusion, oppression, marginalisation and discrimination, which can be discerned using the analytical tool of intersectionality.

Having said this, Collins and Bilge (2016) warn against generalising the data extracted from a particular social context to the broader platform, as it might lead to improper or misapplication of the intersectional framework. Intersectionality as a framework has, over time, undergone multiple changes in terms of the evolution of the word itself and its use as an analytical tool.

The synergy between theory and praxis is central to understanding the intersectional framework. Intersectionality places the aspect of critical inquiry and praxis to denaturalize inequality. The critical praxis in this context refers to the application of an intersectional framework in the realm of everyday life activities, attempting to decipher the overlapping power relations and resisting any form of structural inequality, eventually aiming to transform the existing power relations and status quo. On the other hand, critical inquiry is not far in terms of meaning from that of praxis. “It invokes a broad sense of using an intersectional framework to study a range of social phenomena” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.33). Focusing more on the suffice “critical”, Collins and Bilge (2016) also point to the need for self-reflexivity.

A blind application of this scholarship to the social problem is not what praxis aims to do. Instead, knowledge derived from everyday life activities reflects upon experience and scholarship. In a nutshell, praxis and theory form a whole that informs one another. Intersectionality informs my research ethnography in three different ways; The initial one consists of using the framework as an analytical tool to look into gender, technology and emotion as to how they overlap to dictate the exclusion experienced by the Left-behind wives. The second involves reflexively approaching the aspect of migration, exclusion, and gender theories in the everyday lived experiences of the Left-behind wives in the cultural context of northern Malabar. Finally, intersectionality is used to make sense of the covert forms of resistance practised by the Left-behind wives in their *lifeworld*.

Understanding exclusion in the context of intersectionality takes one to the spiralling debates on identity and identity politics, where intersectionality is critiqued for overemphasising the idea of identity, often leading to its simultaneous recognition as identity studies. The forms of exclusion triggered by the complex interplay of relational factors like gender, sexuality, race, class, caste etc., cannot be comprehended without situating it in the context where the specific identities get socially constructed, leading to the creation of a unique individual. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that the critiques of identity in intersectionality focus on the narrow expressions that centre on the abstract, that is, critical inquiry, which is not going further to embrace the notion of praxis.

Drawing from the intersectionality, Collins and Bilge (2016) further urge the readers to “understand identity as multiply shaped by their shared social location...within interlocking systems of oppression” (p. 116). Positioning this understanding in my study, the location of the Left-behind wives should be read in the context of the socio-cultural realities of northern Malabar, where the identities get constructed within certain structures of power. It is often stated that identity politics is crucial in the making of resistance against oppression, forming the conscience to locate the political in the individual in the quest for social justice. This understanding surfaces from the fact that the identity or rather “identities” precede collectivity/coalition. Criticised for overemphasising the culture and the status of victimhood, identity has been a constant target of Marxists and post-Marxists for ignoring the structure of the class and underplaying the need for economic redistribution. They are undermining the collective nature of the group by means of highlighting the individual who stands next in the line of fire. In between these, Collins and Bilge (2016) also urge us to keep a “self-reflexive eye on their respective identity politics” (p.121). How we can position the identity of the Left-behind wives here is a question of relevance. How do the

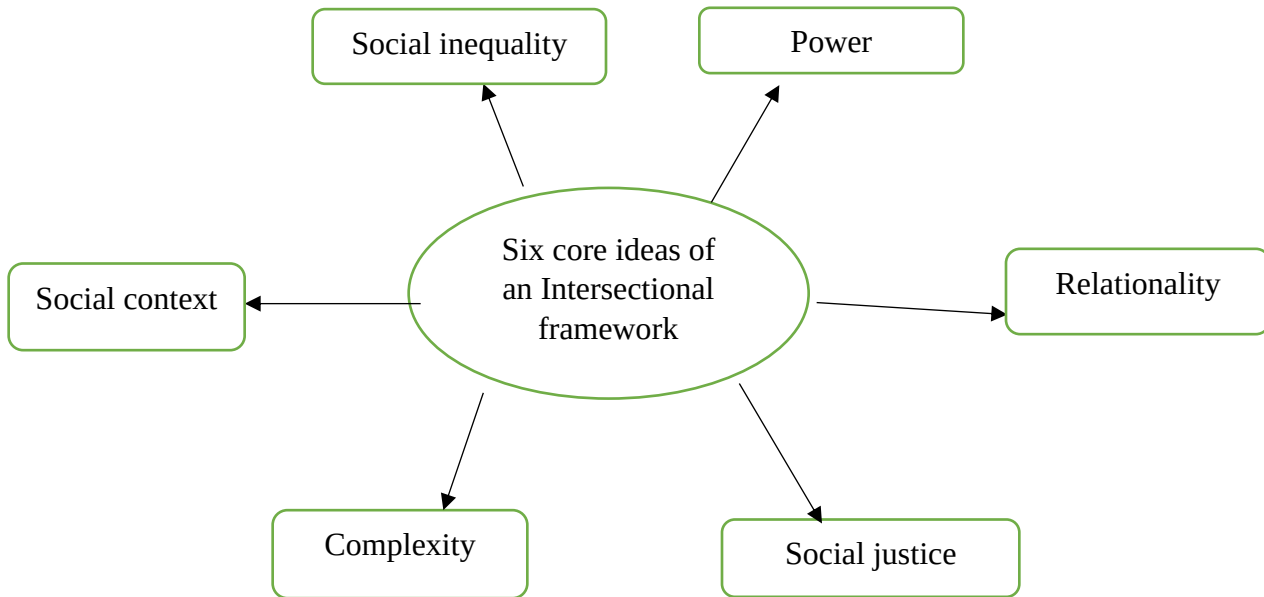
Left-behind wives craft their identities in relation to multiple factors that provide for their exclusion?

Understanding the case of identity formation whilst navigating their *lifeworlds* in the midst of the socio-cultural context of northern Malabar becomes essential here. The aspects such as family, kinship and neighbourhood, coupled with factors like gender, sect, class, area of residence, religion, sexuality etc., also need to be analysed categorically based on the frame of praxis. The impact of technological mediation in the identity formation of Left-behind wives is also looked upon in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

As stated earlier, the criticisms against intersectionality for favouring identity stand valid on the grounds that the subject is limited to enquiry, not crossing to meet the line of praxis. There are points where my study diverges from the broader schema of identity within intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that identity leads to a de-facto coalition. When this is read in the context of the present study, we may be unable to draw in resemblance. The identity of the Left-behind wives did not lead to the creation of a coalition, despite sharing similar spaces and lived experiences. In fact, it is to be noted that when one of the Left-behind wives is accused of adultery or misconduct, the other Left-behind wives stay in tandem with the voice of the general. A collective conscience is not formed in the context of calling for political action. This inaction may be a reaction from a specific socio-cultural society to which they belong. The call for social justice here is essentialised within the self and *lifeworlds* of the Left-behind wives, who take respite in their strategies of everyday resistance with the help of their family members.

The intersectionality becomes crucial in my research because it provides better analytical sophistication and theoretical explanation of how heterogeneous members of a specific group of the Left-behind wives experience the Malabar region's socio-cultural space differently depending on various external factors such as class, gender, sect, and other social locations. The strong implication is that a unified viewpoint cannot be attributed to all wives; their diverse standpoint matters. Further, those standpoints emerge from diverse experiences rather than unified identical experiences. This framework (paradigm) also arouses curiosity about the several layers of privilege and oppression the Left-behind Muslim wives encounter regularly.

Figure 1. Six core ideas of an Intersectional Framework



1.5. Selection and Significance of the Field Sites

Kerala has aced itself in the field of migration. It is considered one of the most productive industries that employ many Indians. Migration makes up the backbone of many families, thus aiding their survival with the remittances sent across the countries. Much of the socio-economic activities in Kerala are catalysed on the basis of these very remittances. It is to be noted that the northern districts are more visible in this sector compared to the southern ones owing to the higher rates of outmigration in the former region.

Many factors were considered while choosing the field sites in northern Kerala. According to statistics and migration reports, Muslims from the northern regions of Malabar account for more than half (53%) of all emigrants from Kerala. Muslim Gulf wives make up 22.9 per cent of Kerala's population. Christians put together 5.3 per cent of the population, while 5.6 per cent are Hindus. Among them, 12.9 per cent of Muslim Left-behind wives live in the Kozhikode district (Zachariah & Rajan, 2007). The empirical investigation of this research is rooted in the Malabar region, where

the highest Muslim population in Kerala resides (69 % as per the 2011 census and 67% as per the 2001 census).

The third-largest city in Kerala, a southern state on India's southwest coast, is Kozhikode, also known as Calicut. As per historical sources, the word Kozhikode is derived from Koyil (place), and Kodu (Fortified) means fortified place. Kozhikode is bordered by Wayanad to the east, Kannur to the north and Malappuram to the south. It covers the taluks of Vada-kara, Koyilandy, and Kozhikode. As per the 2011 census, Kozhikode district has a total population of 30, 89,543 people (see Table 1.1) with a population density of 2,025 people per square kilometre. The sex ratio was 1057, followed by a literacy rate of 95.24 per cent. Historical data on the established trade links across the Indian Ocean has successfully converted the population of Kerala into a multicultural one. The economy has become increasingly reliant on gulf earnings and remittances since the 1980s, as per the observation of Osella and Osella (1999). The glorious past of the district earns Kozhikode the well-deserving title of being a 'cosmopolitan' destination with the highest proportion of Muslim Gulf wives.

Table 1.1 - District wise Population

District	Kozhikode	Malappuram
Male	140942	1960328
Female	1615351	2152592
Total	3086293	4112920

(Source: - Census of India 2011)

The history of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin is very different from that of Malappuram, a former part of the Madras presidency. Malabar joined Travancore and Cochin after Kerala state was created in 1956. Three smaller districts, Kozhikode, Cannanore, and Palaghat, were created from the former Malabar District. Out of these three, Malappuram was created as the fourth district in 1969. Malappuram had a population of 4,112,920 in 2011, with 1,960,328 men and 2,152,592 women (Please refer to Table 1.1). The population density, as per the 2011 census, is 1,157 people per square kilometre, with a sex ratio of 1098 and an average literacy rate of 93.57%. 55.82 per cent of the population in Malappuram districts resides in the rural area and 44.18 per cent in the urban area. It is one of the most Muslim-populated districts in the state, with the highest number of emigrations to Middle Eastern countries. The CDS's Kerala Migration

Survey of 2014 reports the presence of at least one migrant in 34.9% of households in the Malappuram district (See table 1.2).

Table 1.2 - Percentage of Households with at least one Migrant

Districts	Household %
Thiruvananthapuram	17.4
Kollam	20.0
Pathanamthitta	27.2
Alappuzha	14.1
Kottayam	12.4
Idukki	6.2
Ernakulam	12.7
Thrissur	19.2
Palakkad	9.9
Malappuram	34.9
Kozhikode	20.2
Wayanad	9.2
Kannur	28.9
Kasaragod	22.8

(Source: Kerala Migration Survey, CDS 2014)

The census of India in 2001 and 2011 reports that the Muslim population in Malappuram and Kozhikode districts accounts for 2487392 (68.53%) and 2487392 (37.47%) in 2001 and 2971927 and 1093027 in 2011, respectively (see Table 1.3). It is to be noted that 71.75% of the district of Malappuram was inhabited by Muslims in 2011, whereas it was 37.37% in Kozhikode districts. This makes Malappuram the district with the highest Muslim populace in the state of Kerala, followed by Kozhikode. Historically renowned as having the highest per cent of remittances compared to the rest of Kerala, Malappuram has a Muslim population of 71.75 per cent as per the 2011 census (see Table 1.4). The average per cent of total remittance received by the households in Kerala was Rs 32,000, whereas Malappuram received Rs 69,000. Kozhikode and Thrissur got 48,000 and 40,000, respectively (Zachariah & Rajan, 2007). In addition, Malappuram had the highest number of emigrants compared to other districts in Kerala (see Table 1.5).

Table 1.3- Muslim Population in Kerala 2001-2011

		2001			2011		
Sl No	Districts	Total Population	Muslim Population	%	Total Population	Muslim Population	%
1	Trivandrum	3234707	420512	13.34	3307284	397170	12.1
2	Kollam	2584118	473927	18.34	2629703	522804	19.9
3	Pathanamthitta	1231577	56406	4.58	1195537	27124	2.3
4	Alappuzha	2105349	207587	9.86	2121943	389023	18.3
5	Kottayam	1952901	116588	5.97	1979384	57359	2.9
6	Idukki	1128605	81147	7.19	1107453	86893	7.8
7	Ernakulam	3098378	450504	14.54	3279860	454401	13.8
8	Trissur	2975440	488865	16.43	3110327	547838	17.7
9	Palakkad	2617072	703469	26.88	2810892	895857	31.8
10	Malappuram	3629640	2487392	68.53	4141956	2971927	71.75
11	Kozhikode	2878498	2487392	37.47	3089543	1093027	35.37
12	Wayanad	786627	211367	26.87	816558	268880	32.9
13	Kannur	2412365	666536	27.63	2525637	656824	26.0
14	Kasaragod	1203342	412867	34.31	1302600	547651	42.0
Total	Kerala	31838619	7641268	24.0	33387677	8856778	26.5

(Source- Census of India 2001 and 2011)

Table 1.4 - Religious Population of Kozhikode and Malappuram districts

District	Kozhikode	Malappuram
Population	3,086,293	4,112,920
Hindu	56.21 %	27.60 %
Muslim	35.37%	71.75%
Christian	4.26 %	1.98 %
Sikh	0.01 %	0.00 %
Buddhist	0.01 %	0.00 %
Jain	0.02 %	0.00 %
Others	0.02 %	0.01 %
Not Available	0.23 %	0.15 %

(Source: - Census of India 2011)

Table (1.4) shows that the ratio of religious population is higher in Malappuram compared to Calicut. The population of Muslims are the highest in Malappuram (71.75%) and stands out second highest with a population of 35.37 % in Calicut. The number of people belonging to the Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain communities is also high in the district of Calicut compared to Malappuram, varying between 0.01 and 0.02 per cent.

Table 1.5- District wise Gulf Emigrants, 2011

Districts	Emigrants 2011
Thiruvananthapuram	229732
Kollam	167446
Pathanamthitta	91381
Alappuzha	144386
Kottayam	117460
Idukki	7690
Ernakulam	136113
Thrissur	198368
Palakkad	142020
Malappuram	408884
Kozhikode	206719
Wayanad	26874
Kannur	283045
Kasaragod	120425
Kerala	2280543

(Source: - Census of India 2011)

Table 1.5 provides the district-wise emigration rate to the Gulf in the state of Kerala as per the 2011 census of India. In 2011, approximately 2.28 million Kerala emigrants (EMI) were reported to be working overseas (Zachariah & Rajan (2012). Table (1.5) demonstrates that Malappuram has the highest number of Gulf migrants, with a sum of 408,88,4. The Kozhikode district is in the fifth position with 206,71,9 emigrants, and the district of Idukki has the least number of Gulf migrants with 769,0 emigrants. CDS Report of Kerala migration survey 2014 notes that the number of migrants in the districts of Kerala has hiked in the year 2014 compared to that of 2011. As per this report, the number of migrants in Malappuram changed from 408,88,4 in 2011 to 444100 in 2014, and Kozhikode rose from 206719 in 2011 to 224638 in 2014 (see Table

1.6). While making a town-wise classification of religious population (see table 1.7), Vengara and Mooniyor towns in Malappuram, with the majority of the Muslim population, have the highest number of Gulf migrants.

Table 1.6- Distribution with the District of Origin in 2014, CDS Report

Districts	No. Migrants
Thiruvananthapuram	248852
Kollam	197014
Pathanamthitta	137730
Alappuzha	89905
Kottayam	110411
Idukki	23945
Ernakulam	186765
Thrissur	224978
Palakkad	69186
Malappuram	444100
Kozhikode	224638
Wayanad	20511
Kannur	290335
Kasaragod	93598
Total Kerala	2361968

(Source: Kerala Migration Survey, CDS 2014)

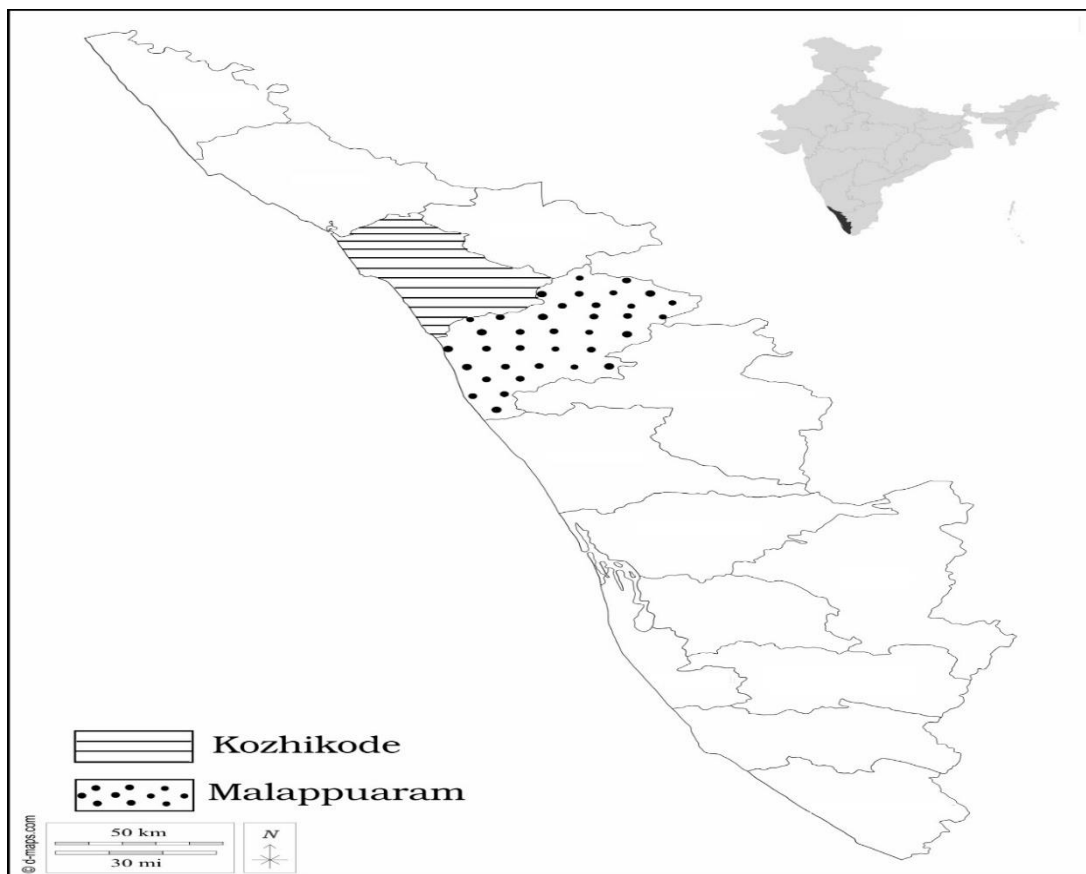
Table 1.7 -Town-wise Religious Population

Towns	Majority Religion	Hindu (%)	Muslim (%)
Malappuram	Muslim	23.47	74.83
Kondotty	Muslim	19.64	79.77
Ponnani	Muslim	31.02	68.31
Kottakkal	Muslim	26.13	72.99
Vengara	Muslim	14.60	84.91
Moonniyur	Muslim	21.97	77.68
Karuvanthiruthy	Muslim	45.27	53.91
Cheruvannur	Muslim	33.51	64.20
Nadapuram	Muslim	47.52	52.21
Feroke	Muslim	43.36	55.91
Beypore	Muslim	47.14	51.78

(Source: - Census of India 2011)

I have identified Chelari, Chemmad, Chelembra, Idimuzhikkal, Kodinji, Kodyathoor, Kondotty, Kottakkal, Kottakadavu, Malappuram Munniyoor, Parappanagadi Ponmala, Ponnani, Valancheri and Vengara as localities in the Malappuram district. Localities such as Beypore, Chelannur, Cheruvannor, Feroke, Kadalundi, Karuvnathiruty, Koduvalli, Koyilandi, Kunnamangalam, Kuttichira, Mannoor, Nadapuram, Nallalam, Perambra, Ramanattukara and Vadakara were chosen from the Kozhikode district. Also, most of the regions are Muslim-majority areas (see Table 1.7), and the above-identified locations have a high hand in historical Gulf earnings. Kozhikode and Malappuram being districts that share a border, exhibit cultural similarities apart from their population dynamics. I obtained a number of respondents from these locations and spoke with them. I also managed to conduct in-depth interviews. The data collection methods and the ethnographic experiences I have employed in this research are discussed in the following section.

Map 1.1- Geographical Location of Kozhikode and Malappuram Districts



1.6 Methodology

While going forward with the review of literature, I felt the need to check into the field to gain a grassroots-level understanding. After all, what the field offer will be different from that of the text. Additionally, each field opens up a plethora of enriching information that can bring a new dimension to an existing study. Thus, I decided to conduct a pilot study in the northern region of Kerala, specifically in the districts of Kozhikode and Malappuram. This study was scheduled for the month of August 2018. Utilising convenient sampling, I reached out to ten respondents during the pilot study via a convenient sampling technique, five from both districts, respectively, to conduct an in-depth interview.

My extended family and acquaintances made up the majority of the respondents during the pilot study. I did this intentionally to obtain as much data as possible. While conducting fieldwork, several qualitative interviews with the Left-behind wives and their husbands were undertaken. I interviewed one hundred and twenty-four Left-behind wives from the field. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to interview these 124 respondents drawn via snowball sampling, which was recorded with their consent. The collected data was evaluated using Excel sheets after I generated tables for the same. Many of these interviews were on broad and generic lines. Long-term interactions and close connections with a few of them provided a meaningful substance to the data post, for which I shortlisted thirty respondents from a total of one-hundred-and-four, who later on turned out to be my key respondents/informants. The thirty Left-behind wives were discretely chosen for the in-depth interviews based on their openness and willingness to share their emotions, experiences and life circumstances with me. Purposive sampling was used in this stage.

Keeping up the diversity of the respondents, the thirty Left-behind wives from Kozhikode and Malappuram hailed from different classes, sects, educational backgrounds, ages, and various other intersecting factors. The primary method of my data collection was the in-depth interview. To comprehend the subject in a more meaningful manner, I also interviewed the husbands, children, and parents of some of the key respondents.

1.6.1. Tools of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The nature of the study is placed in such a way that in order to locate the subjective experiences of the Left-behind wives, one is supposed to know the field in detail, along with the

subjects involved. The knowledge generated from the field is strongly contextualised; the space in which these women exist and interact becomes crucial in this sense. First and foremost, research of this kind propels the need to divulge beyond the quantification of the data. It requires the researcher to engage with the respondents in a nuanced manner, and therefore, I chose qualitative approaches in this study. An enquiry into the lifeworld of Muslim Left-behind wives necessitates the usage of various ethnographic methods to explore the subject. Going for the ethnographic methods was a strategic decision to engage with the field in a meaningful and dialogic manner to activate active observation whereby the subjects can be located in their micro and macro settings where they create the concept of their everyday lives. I chose this specific method due to its creative synthesis of participatory and non-participatory observation, In-depth interview and group discussions.

By evaluating their narratives and conducting in-depth interviews with them, I was able to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences and social realities. To keep up with the authentic nature of the ethnography, I have used narrative inquiry (first-person narrative) in my qualitative data, where I have employed in-depth interviews; to make sense of their everyday lives and conflicts in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It helped me to uncover their attitudes, behaviours and perceptions regarding certain aspects of life. I made use of a semi-structured interview schedule for this purpose, as not all of my respondents were educated. The questions were open-ended in nature. All these helped me to navigate through the course of the fieldwork in a free manner. The open-ended questions helped in gaining active responses from the participants. As the schedule was semi-structured, I was able to retain the flexible nature and ask extra questions as the need be. This provided an easy flow to the dialogues and conversations. I also diligently observed their gestures and expressions to add to the subjective aspects of the study. The phrases, the minute actions, body language and expressions of happiness, sadness or fear gave more than what the conversations did.

Post the collection of the data, I understood that the substantiation of certain data required it to be quantified. For this purpose, I made use of Excel sheets. In accordance with the trends and patterns of the responses, I classified and codified the data and later tabulated it. The tables are dispersed across the chapters to provide an easy first glimpse of understanding. Further, as most of my respondents were from the Malabar region, every response was recorded in their mother

tongue, Malayalam. This includes calls, text messages, WhatsApp voices, and so on, which necessitated the need to transcribe it into English for the analysis. I made sure to transcribe the narratives every day to retain the freshness and authenticity of the data.

As home cinemas make up a significant part of this study, during the course of the research, I watched six home cinemas, namely, *Parethan thirich varunnu* (The Deceased Returns), *Aliyanoru Free Visa* (A Free Visa for the Brother-in-Law), *Kududmba Kalaham nooram divas am* (Family Quarrel: 100th Day), and *Nashtapariharam* (Compensation). The genesis of the home movies of Kerala goes back to the 1990s. The forerunners of this revolutionary move were Salam Kodyathoor, Siddique Kodyathoor and Razak Vazhiyoram. These were locally produced movies that were not screened in theatres. Hence, the availability of the same was restricted to the local shops cheap CDs/DVDs. These films mostly portrayed but were not restricted to the regional Malabar scenarios, the GCC migrant concerns and the domestic tensions in the families of the migrants. The dialect was profoundly Mappila. This facilitated the critical content analysis of the same, which is described in chapter two. To keep up confidentiality, in line with the ethics of social science research, pseudonyms were given to the respondents.

1.6.2. A Note on Ethnographic Methods and Experiences

Ethnographic approaches are predominantly charged with personal and emotional dynamics, which makes it impossible to separate the self from the field, especially when one is to conduct fieldwork at one's own home. This research was influenced by my own experiences as a Muslim woman from Malabar, which helped me identify the specific standpoint and the consequent production of knowledge. Being a member of the Mappila Muslim community, specifically a Mappila Muslim woman, gave me the tag of being an insider in my field. In contrast, my outsider title comes along with not being a Left-behind wife. Having said that, I have encountered the experiences of the Left-behind wives since childhood, as I belonged to a joint family where two of my father's brothers worked in Gulf countries. I have observed the experiences of my aunts as the Left-behind wives.

An accurate portrayal requires speaking to them rather than speaking for them, as Alcoff (1991) and Spivak (1988) argue. However, I asked myself how I could fairly portray their voices if I could not do justice to their voices. How can I speak for them if I do not speak to them? How can I figure out and account for my own personal impact on the research process? Because each

person has unique intersecting experiences, no two intersectional experiences are alike (Crenshaw, 1991). Measuring intersectionality and documenting the intersectional experiences of the Left-behind wives has always been a challenge to me. I experienced difficulty while making generalisations and paying attention to the particulars. This was also an element of the ‘friction of feminist objectivity’ (Van Witteloostuijn, 2017) that I encountered. Then, while reading feminist scholarship, I realised that locating myself and accounting for the respondents as they are, are two necessary procedures in intersectional qualitative research for removing my prejudice to some extent (Acker et al., 1983; Haraway, 1988).

As mentioned in the preceding section, I have adopted ethnographic methods such as non-participant observation, informal interactions, focus group discussions and various newspaper reports to determine the data’s quality and retain the authenticity of the same. Direct and indirect participatory observation for a specific period of time was employed to gauge the everyday lives of the respondents. Using these tools and techniques, I was able to learn more about the field and the participants. One should be conscious while choosing one method for contemplation as it might end up creating blind spots in our research (Davis, 2014). This can be challenging because we are often ignorant of our blind spots. One should be mindful of the questions concerning distinctions that are not part of the main study. This means that “asking the other question,” placing oneself in a historical situation and thinking more deeply about the categories utilised are significant. To put it differently, the study forces to recognise one’s own thought habits and then actively change them. (Van Witteloostuijn, 2017). As I began to consider intersectionality, I made an effort to make sure that the respondents were as diverse as possible, as this is a prerequisite for identifying intersectionality (Banjac, 2021; Remedios & Snyder, 2015).

In my research, I used personal narratives and interviews to examine the lived experiences of the Left-behind Muslim wives at the intersection of multiple identities, much like Adib and Guerrier (2003) and Essers and Benschop (2007) did in their works. Additionally, as Lutz (2015) noted, I have seen how my positionality and that of my respondents vary depending on the setting. In intersectional research, positionality refers to the way every situated knowledge is organised within the inquiry (Lutz, 2015). Accordingly, I have not only examined multiple factors like gender, education, age, religion, and others, but also the implications of these variants for both the researcher and the research of inquiry, as Van Witteloostuijn (2017) stated in his thesis.

In-depth interviews were used, and they began with the following open-ended questions: what was it like to be a Left-behind wife? What was the reaction of her parents, neighbours, and acquaintances to her marrying a Gulf migrant, and how did she communicate with her husband? What changes have occurred in her communication styles since the popularity of smartphones? Whether she had the experience of being a widow while being the wife of a Gulf migrant, whether she has had any unforgettable incidents as a Left-behind wife, and how she handled the responsibilities of single parenting with her husband abroad. To learn more about the participants' perspectives on becoming a Gulf wife, I asked if she wanted to marry her daughter off to a Gulf migrant. These inquiries frequently encouraged interviewees not only to take a critical stance on a certain subject but also to share their personal insights and experiences, as well as society's attitudes and expectations about them, with me. This prompted them to say more about the nuances in power structures established in their familial and social relationships as a Gulf wife.

In addition, with the participants' permission, I made use of an audio recording method as well as handwritten notes to obtain a comprehensive description. The audio recording method allowed me to concentrate on the respondents' responses without having to worry about taking notes, and it occasionally led to me asking more pertinent questions. Some participants, however, refused to allow audio recording and showed uneasiness; in these circumstances, I elicited data by employing paper pen scribbling. Informal talks with respondents and their family members provided me with a detailed understanding of their families, socio-economic and cultural origins, and attitudes regarding societal stigma. This also helped me establish a connection with the potential respondents, who opened up about their personal experiences, inner thoughts, and emotions. During the casual discussions, I improved my active listening skills, which resulted in enhanced productivity and data integrity.

Digital techniques have also been employed to collect data regarding Covid-19-experiences. Digital fieldwork as a method plays an important part in today's world, redefining notions and practices. As Hine (2000) correctly portrays, the internet is a space for all types of social interaction, as well as culture and cultural artefacts. Digital tools have been very valuable in my research. During the period of the covid pandemic, I primarily used digital tools, which tremendously aided me in gathering more relevant data. The snowball sampling approach was used to randomly select new samples until I got the desired sample size. Initial respondents suggested

people they knew, which aided me in locating successive potential study participants. Prior to conducting in-depth interviews with Muslim Left-behind wives, I gathered information about their demographics, as well as Malabar's cultural background and the impact of modern technology on the daily lives of Gulf wives.

At the outset, I did my fieldwork by obtaining information from the Left-behind wives from family and friends in order to elicit unusual feelings from interviewees. Later on, I gathered enough samples for data collection by using snowball sampling with these participants. Whenever I met new respondents, I introduced myself by mentioning the names of those respondents who suggested them to me, which assisted me in receiving proper treatment and avoiding difficult circumstances with the participants. However, I encountered a number of unpleasant circumstances in the field, most of which were caused by the respondent's mother-in-law and other senior members of the household. Elderly family members of respondents were concerned that I would divulge their information to the government and raise their taxes. One participant's mother-in-law inquired about government aid, such as allowances. They were quite curious to know more about the research and the interviews with them.

During the initial phase of the interviews, the majority of the participants stated nothing of extramarital allegations or terrible experiences they had as Left-behind wives. They opened up about their unfavourable experiences after two to three visits and numerous informal interactions with them. Some interviewees, however, were anxious about the location where we were discussing their secretive experiences, so they invited me to the terrace or other private locations. However, my private talks with the respondents raised suspicions among other family members, particularly the in-laws, which I could grasp directly from their facial expressions and murmuring. One of the key respondent's mothers-in-law inquired as to why we kept our distance from her during the interview and why we couldn't speak in front of her. I managed to react to these embarrassing queries in some way. My stay and interview with my aunties and cousins have enabled me to observe the more nuanced aspects and thereby gather detailed information regarding them.

Furthermore, whenever I had a first-time interaction, I always brought a native person with me. My friend, neighbour, or relative belonging to that native is referred to here as a "native person". A few respondents agreed to take me to neighbouring homes and introduced me politely.

However, it had a dual effect: on the one hand, it helped to avoid the weird feeling; on the other hand, it had a negative impact in that the respondents who accompanied me stood by my side in the neighbouring homes until the interview concluded. Because of this, several participants withheld a lot of information from me in front of a familiar face. Although, through frequent visits and interactions, I eventually formed a bond with the respondents, and sometimes, even their children responded to my queries, inferring and providing more knowledge and understanding about some incidents. To enhance the information I acquired from women, I began interviewing children and other family members, as Berk (1985) did in her research on the ‘gender factory’ (i.e., the household).

During the fieldwork, I was able to attend two marriage functions in Malappuram (particularly in the villages of Munniyoor and Chelembra). I conducted a Focus Group Discussion with the respondents, which revealed the societal attitudes and opinions towards the Left-behind wives. I just opened the FGD by talking about some newspaper articles about the Left-behind wives without notifying them that they were part of a group discussion. During the discussion, they recounted some of the rumours they heard from their neighbourhood and some vulgar messages that they received after their husband’s migration. Some of the women highlighted how difficult it was to live with in-laws without the presence of their husbands, as well as how they suffered domestic violence, including verbal abuse and accusations of lavishly squandering remittances supplied by their husbands. In other words, other research dimensions were brought to me during the Focus Group Discussion.

I examined the data from many perspectives in order to improve the analysis and interpretation. I attempted to examine the data multiple times, each time by focusing on a different central question to avoid missing out on diverse viewpoints that are vital in intersectionality research, as advocated by Van Witteloostuijn (2017). Furthermore, whilst conducting this study intersectionally, I kept Van Witteloostuijn’s (2017) three points in mind: locating myself and the respondents, reflecting on the categorisations employed during the study, and analysing and interpreting the data from multiple perspectives.

I completed the data collection just before the coronavirus outbreak, and it took me one year and two months in the field. My fieldwork ended on January 2020. However, following the Covid-19 epidemic, I returned to the field in September 2020 to gather information on how the

virus has affected the lives of the Left-behind wives and their families. Due to the epidemic, a large number of Gulf migrants returned to their home country, where they spent their first extended period of time with their families for more than eight months. Examining the emotional components of the Left-behind wives and their spouses throughout the pandemic strengthened the research. When I visited and expressed my questions, even the close relatives made an awful impression. However, later, many of the interviewees apologised to me over WhatsApp for their disrespectful behaviour during that time. The fact that I arrived through public transportation led several participants to believe that I was a virus carrier. The majority of the respondents were reluctant to discuss the effects of Covid-19 and their personal experiences with the researcher. Due to the nature of the pandemic, I had to deal with some difficult situations from the participants during the Covid-19-related questioning phase.

Only ten respondents expressed their thoughts on the effects of Covid-19 and their experiences with it on the emotional states of the respondents. I started using digital tools like WhatsApp and telephonic conversations as soon as the Covid protocols were put in place. I contacted the respondents using WhatsApp for the purpose of detailed data collection, and the participants answered via WhatsApp voice notes. Some of them immediately deleted their response (voice notes) once they reached me. When I questioned them about this behaviour, they said that their narratives were intimate details of their emotional lives, and they were concerned about the information getting leaked somehow. They always took care to ensure that their children would not learn the information they discussed with me. The respondents were concerned about mistakenly sharing the interview content with their children, especially during the epidemic when most students were taking online programmes and frequently used their mothers' mobile phones to attend classes. Some of the interviewees immediately deleted the tape after recording it without even checking to see if I had heard it in order to prevent this; however, in response to my request, some of the interviewees recorded and talked about their feelings and ideas once more.

1.6.2.1. Access and Challenges to the Field

Reaching out to the field and identifying the respondents was not difficult for me, but gathering data from the field took a lot of effort. Most of them withheld vital information during the early conversations. But as we got to know one another, they started to open up, and that is when I started gathering the data. Some of them were perplexed and asked me to confirm my whereabouts

so they could be certain they were not disclosing their personal information to someone with malicious intentions. I started by explaining to some of my respondents about the PhD degree and thesis writing, and later on, I responded to their questions and comments on why Muslim women seek further education outside Kerala. Some of the key respondents (those who are graduates of my age and not more than thirty years old) inquired whether pursuing higher education after marriage causes any problems in my in-laws' household and mockingly passed a remark about me being not 'here' (at home) while husband is 'here.' They also inquired about women's safety, hostel life, and food availability in a mess. Also, some of them asked if I had visited places in Hyderabad, particularly Ramoji film city, and a few of them told me that they had visited Ramoji during their college tour, while some of them told me that they visited the same with their husbands - gulf migrants when they were on leave.

I met an older man who turned out to be the respondent's father-in-law when I entered the courtyard of one of the respondents' homes during my first official visit as part of the data collection with my cousin. He asked us abruptly what the purpose of the visit was, to which my cousin replied that I was conducting a study on Gulf migrants' wives. The respondent's father-in-law then questioned me again, claiming that they were wasting gulf earnings and leading a lavish lifestyle. He laughed mockingly. Another group of people I have observed also had a similar viewpoint about Gulf wives. In this regard, one of the challenges I had was figuring out how to appropriately depict the respondents. By situating oneself as a researcher and accounting for the way one represents others, one can achieve objectivity and fairly represent others (Acker et al., 1983; Alcoff, 1991).

I employed a variety of strategies throughout the research process to best illustrate the voices of Left-behind wives. An essential step was to record as many of their responses and comments as possible, then transcribe, analyse, and document them in the context of the narrations. I showed both the transcribed version and the original accounts to one of my co-scholars to check whether I had misjudged these women. In a nutshell, I reproduced the original voices of the women, as they are the basis of standpoint knowledge. Keeping up with this technique, I was able to retain the original voices in the final draft, which assured me that I did not misread the women and that I did not miss anything relevant that had been said.

I stayed at my aunt's house as part of my fieldwork without informing the household that I was there for research purposes. She is a Left-behind wife who lives in a separate home with her two children near her husband's ancestral home. Hearing some sounds from outside, I discreetly watched her movements and noted their apprehension and attentiveness. She gave a negative response when I questioned if she remained watchful and cautious while hearing the sounds at night when her husband was home. I had informal encounters with several individuals during my stay, and as a result, I became aware of the value of having a prolonged dialogue. Conversely, whenever I visited them, they voluntarily shared their experiences and life stories. The fieldwork got tougher after three and a half months. The narratives were skillfully translated into English with the assistance of my partner and a friend.

My religion and religious appearance at the time of the interview aided me in gaining my first entry to the respondents' residences. However, I was indebted to answer their query regarding myself- my choice of remaining away from my husband, which made some of the elderly family members sceptical about me. Even worse, I sensed that some of the respondents were beginning to have misgivings about my character. I found techniques to deal with the challenging fieldwork experiences I had as a social science researcher. Gradually, I began to establish a rapport with the family's elderly members by listening to what they had to say and asking them about their life experiences, which worked in certain houses. Some families avoided the researcher-respondent dialogue as a result of mothers-in-law interrupting the session and the researcher's question. In some other households, the mothers-in-law managed to keep an eye on me while they moved around us, giving me the impression that I was being monitored by a surveillance camera.

1.7. Self-reflexivity

Feminist research centralizes the concept of Self-reflexivity to a great extent (Davis, 2008; Hunting, 2014; Lutz, 2015), challenging social researchers to analyze and evaluate their own social location and its significant influence on the conduct of the research (Rayaprol, 2016). It takes into account one's role as a researcher and acknowledges the perspective from which one generates knowledge (Davis, 2014; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993; Hunting, 2014; Rich, 1984). Rayaprol (2016) considers her experiential world as "gendered spaces and complex locations" (p.380), from where I draw a need to be self-reflexive. Creating a 'situated knowledge', according to Haraway (1988), requires one to engage in an activity of positioning oneself. There is nothing like a view

from nowhere; every viewpoint has a tale to tell that must be taken into account. This eliminates the conception of a single truth and reinstates different versions of the same based on the social standing of the knowledge-producer (Van Witteloostuijn, 2017).

In her lecture ‘Notes toward a Politics of Location’, Rich (1984) speaks of the need to situate oneself within the field of study and emphasizes the significance of acknowledging numerous locations that one engages with. Locations cannot be categorized exclusively as geographical. One needs to ponder historical locations and the various markers of identity as well. Rich (1984) insists on acknowledging the situated information one generates within the location and views identities as dynamic; continually evolving. On similar lines, Van Witteloostuijn (2017) also asks us to be reflexive of our own standpoints and refrain from making a generalized assumption of voicing out for others. Alcoff (1991) points out certain measures to reflect more deeply on one’s positionality. His primary tenet is on why a certain study is important, followed by what is the specificity of the location and context of the research. Furthermore, he also looks into how others react to one’s work and words. These questions influenced me strongly whilst examining the research process. Self-reflexivity for England (1994) is a “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (p. 82). The generation of knowledge is defined by one’s social situation (Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 1999). Harding (1993) stresses the need to address the social location of the researcher and the researched.

One of the very first obstacles that I encountered during my research process was in positioning myself. This includes determining how to describe my position as a researcher and taking into account my influences on the collection and processing of data. I tried to retain a neutral stand as far as possible. Later on, I realized the exclusive nature of my standpoint in the production of knowledge in this respective work. My personal experiences, knowledge and convictions have invariably influenced my research and its consequent findings. As a twenty-seven years-old married Sunni woman hailing from a middle-class family in northern Kerala, I endured a variety of social factors, including gender, religion, age, and class, making up an intersectional maze. Being a woman born and brought up in a middle-class family in Kerala opened up the trajectories of institutional sexism and hardships. The absence of a male guardian or ‘man’ power paved the way for the subjection of different forms of injustice, including sexual harassment, stigmatization, and social discrimination, as I witnessed during my childhood days.

Many of my male relatives are working in Middle Eastern countries, and I have witnessed the challenges experienced by their spouses. The Gulf wives in my locality represent a subservient woman subjected to social-sexual stigma. Accusations of extramarital affairs are the most common allegation against women in the absence of their husbands, as I have witnessed in the case of my close relatives and friends. These experiences played a significant role in developing my research interest. I narrowed down upon the poor depictions and treatment of the Left-behind wives with a critical glance. I was deeply dissatisfied by the unsystematic and false narratives portrayed, which ended up creating an existential crisis for them. Northern Kerala, dominated by the patriarchal culture, subjugated these subjects as subservient and dormant, which instigated me to engage with them more deeply. I have tried to respond against the treatment of Left-behind wives by exploring the lifeworld of *Gulfukarante Bharya* ('wives of migrant men' in Malayalam), their existential crisis and everyday strategies in a patriarchal society utilizing qualitative narratives from the region of Malabar region.

Apart from Left-behind wives, any woman living without the shadow of the male kin is subjected to public scrutiny. Public spaces have successfully created the perception of this population as invisible and silent. Labelled as the 'second sex' (De Beauvoir, 1956), women are taught to be submissive. Any opposition or challenges against the production of male knowledge and societal norms are discouraged, either actively or passively. Society has always characterized the feminine body as passive. Nithya (2013) argues that "history shows that women have never had an opportunity to express their individuality since their freedom has always been suppressed by their immediate society" (p.1).

Society revolves around the discourses of gender binaries, gender norms, and gender relations. Explicit and implicit elements of male dominance make it impossible to exclude gender as a topic from being discussed academically or non-academically. A discourse on gender located in a specific geographical region like Malabar, along with its special connection with migration, always necessitates a nuanced probing into the everyday practices of Muslim women in Kerala society. It necessitates the need to critically investigate the experiences of the Gulf wives and their struggles in a patriarchal society. This study, in particular, addresses those wives who have been Left-behind in society as a result of their partners' migration for their family's livelihood.

1.8 Chapter Outlines

The thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter I, the introductory chapter, presents the context of the study, review of literature, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, and objectives of the study. Along with this, it also presents the ethnographic methods and several tools and techniques used in the course of this research. The chapter also makes a detailed fieldwork experience, including the access and constraints to the fields and respondents, as well as the self-reflexivity. The theory used in this thesis decorates the realm of the paradigm of intersectionality with a specific focus on the synergy between theory and praxis. The chapter schema concludes this chapter.

The second chapter, titled ‘Left-behind Wives: Culture, Gender and Media’, focuses on how Malabar’s cultural context produces patriarchal prescriptions in society. The chapter is a demonstration of how the cultural influences in northern Kerala ‘enable’ and ‘restrain’ the wives who are left behind by their partners- the Gulf migrants. It also explains how social institutions such as family and marriage have played the role of carriers of cultural components in general and have been crucial in transmitting the gendered culture especially. In addition, it looks at how the media and literature contribute to the making of gendered culture and act as secondary agents of socialization, specifically with ‘home cinema’. I argue in this chapter that media, literature and discourses, particularly the home cinemas have a crucial role in producing and perpetuating the Left-behind wives as ‘sexually thirst and accessible’ women.

The third chapter, titled ‘Emotions and Experiences: The Social Landscape of the Left-behind Wives,’ is based on empirical research using qualitative data gathered in the field through in-depth interviews as well as personal narratives from the wives of Gulf migrants in northern Kerala. It looks at the trajectory and development of the emerging branch of academia, i.e., the sociology of emotion and then moves towards showing how the sociocultural contexts, especially gender-based socialization, determine the formation of emotions, emotional dynamics and emotional expressions. It claims that in addition to biological influences, socio-cultural and economic factors have been found to have a considerable impact on emotions. It also delves into *Kathupattu's* emotional side.

The fourth chapter, titled ‘Technology and Gender: Surveillance on the Left-behind Wives’, presents the role of modern technology in the lives of the wives of Gulf migrants. With

the impact of globalisation and modernisation, accessed easily with modern communication technologies, the lives of both migrant husbands and Left-behind wives have been impacted. This chapter also deals with the positive and negative experiences of the Left-behind wives with regard to modern technology and devices.

Chapter V has two parts; the first part concentrates on the impact of Covid-19 on the lives of Left-behind wives through the lens of emotion. It is also based on the narratives of Left-behind wives, which reveals the experiences of both emotional well-being and emotional imbalances brought on by the presence of the spouses during the pandemic period. The second section provides a detailed description of how Left-behind wives in patriarchal societies compromise, negotiate and endure the social world that intrudes into their personal lives, as well as untangle the significance of their daily problems and social strategizing. It also looks at how the Left-behind wives deal with these family commitments and how they construct their own spaces to lead their lives.

The fifth chapter is succeeded by the conclusion chapter (Chapter VI), which highlights the research's major findings, recommendations, and inferences with sociological insights.

Chapter II

Left-behind Wives: Culture, Gender and Media

This chapter intends to explore the cultural elements which construct the notion of the ideal woman, specifically the ideal Left-behind wife in society. The initial part of this chapter attempts to trace the epistemic profile of the Left-behind wives in order to problematize their positionality. Taking a cue from the fieldwork, this chapter closely identifies the nuanced cultural elements and the ‘social making’ of the Muslim Left-behind wives. This is an attempt to reveal determinants and constraints embedded in the patriarchal society with regard to the Left-behind wives and to show how certain kinds of knowledge are constituted as ‘dominant’ and are publicly accepted. The elements and factors explained here have emerged through the participants’ responses during informal conversations, in-depth interviews, participant observations and content analysis of the digital media with a focus on ‘Home Cinemas.’ The intention here is to elucidate the role of popular literature, media and films in shaping public perception of the Left-behind wives and shaming them for their alleged extramarital affairs. The data obtained from the field and from the content analysis of the literature and media make the chapter richer. The chapter is divided into four sections and is further divided into related headings and subheadings.

2.1. Locating the Epistemology of Left-behind Wives

Social sciences, for the longest period, had housed androcentric narratives. Persistent debates on the exclusion of the other genders began during the 1980s, which led to the tokenistic addition of female narratives in academia. Speaking about the trajectory of the feminist methodology, one should note that the early feminist scholarship was primarily concerned with “adding women” (Rayaprol, 2016, p. 370) or bringing women into the research bend. This was an empiricist project that aimed to resolve the existing ‘male bias’ by documenting the lives and experiences of women who had previously been overlooked in social science research agendas (Rayaprol, 2016). This was a popular framework until critics such as Dorothy Smith and other feminist sociologists pointed out that simply including gender as a variable in sociological research was insufficient because it only included women and that research should be conducted from the ‘perspective’ of women (Rayaprol, 2016). As a result, the feminist standpoint theoretical framework arose from

the standpoint of women producing “knowledge (that was) grounded in experience” (Rayaprol, 2016, p. 371).

According to Rayaprol (2016), “Standpoint feminism sees women as the agents of knowledge. Women’s experiences become resources for social analysis, and it is women who should be able to reveal what women’s experiences really are” (p. 372). As a critique of the standpoint feminism, Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 2012, and 2016) and Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1991) developed the concept of the intersectionality framework. According to this view, women cannot simply be the agents of knowledge, or their experiences cannot simply be said from their perspective. But their intersectional and layered identities should be considered.

My research is guided by a feminist perspective, specifically intersectional feminism. As a methodological and ethical paradigm, intersectionality affirms the multiplicity of women’s lived experiences and feminist approaches in general (Kiguwa, 2019). Most of the time, as a patriarchal society, women’s experiences have been ignored in Kerala society. Sreekumar (2009), in *Scripting Lives: Narratives of ‘Dominant Women’ in Kerala*, rightly stresses how the ‘experiential knowledge’ is relegated to the irrelevant, trivial, and unimportant by most disciplines and how that then turns out to be uncountable and excluded from the ‘accepted knowledge structures’ in the system. Applying this theory to the case of Muslim women, I elucidate in the thesis various forms in which Muslim women have been subjugated; as women, as Muslim women and as Left behind Muslim wives. I take this philosophical question of experiential knowledge on par with the societal issues and consequences caused by the dynamic process of exclusion in the context of the phenomenon of migration. And I use the feminist methodology that tries to establish a research technique that is congruent with feminist goals of promoting gender equality (Taylor, 1998). In order to discern the subject in a holistic manner, one needs to get a clear idea of the various elements that the field incorporates. The personal accounts of the respondents, when read in the absence of what makes up their socio-economic, political and cultural background, would be nothing less than a worthless pursuit.

As the study is primarily based on the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives, looking at their social, cultural and economic background makes it meaningful. It enables us to create a clear image of the respondents’ dispositions (nature) and makes it easier to draw suitable conclusions in the fieldwork chapters regarding the structural variety of the respondents. In every sociological

study based on information received from people, the structural elements of the respondents have a considerable impact on the expression of their viewpoints, beliefs, ideals, and emotions. As a result, a short overview of the personal account is necessary. Thus, this part includes data on the respondent's class, locality, sect, age, occupation, residential pattern and structure of the family.

Class Distribution of the Respondents

The concept of class, in terms of sociological references, majorly points to its Western emergence. The colonial and post-colonial migration brought changes to this geographical location of the class, wherein the ideas of gender, race, ethnicity, etc., started gaining momentum. The notion of class cannot be applied to the Indian subcontinent uncritically. When it comes to India, one needs to identify the important aspect of the caste. There is a need to recognize the connection between class and caste. It cannot be studied independently. Kerala, considered to be having higher marks in the standard of living, also needs a close reading of all the intersectional indices in order to unravel the depth of these components.

The public education system in the state of Kerala has played a very significant role in the socio-economic and cultural positionality of the population there. The majority of the people/households belong to at least the lower middle class when compartmentalized categorially on the basis of economy and standard of living. Having said that, this is not to state that the societal attitude of the Keralites is not patriarchal. The aspects of gender, class, caste etc., play a strong role in the making and contesting of patriarchal ideas. The Muslim community of Kerala is not different in terms of this general story. The Muslim community belonged to the working class, which later helped to elevate their status to that of the middle class in the later stages.

The majority of the respondents are from the middle class (44.35 per cent), followed by the upper class (35.48 per cent), and then the upper-middle class (20.16 per cent). Among the 124 respondents, I have eleven key respondents from both the middle and upper classes, as well as eight key respondents from the upper-middle class.

Table. 2.1- Class Category of the Respondents

Class	Frequency	%
Middle class	55	44.35
Upper Middle class	25	20.16
Upper class	44	35.48
Grand Total	124	100

The Locality of the Respondents

Locality of the study is also an important factor. The region under the present study can be categorized into urban, semi-urban and rural. There is a difference in terms of accessibility to the infrastructures of health, education, transport etc., based on the type of locality in which the individuals reside. This is a significant element that cannot be excluded when one is studying the lived experiences of a particular community.

Table 2.2 shows the locality of the respondents; the majority of them belong to semi-urban places (45.16 per cent), and 20.97 per cent only stay in urban localities.

Table. 2.2- Locality of the Respondents

Locality	Frequency	%
Rural	42	33.87
Semi-urban	56	45.16
Urban	26	20.97
Total	124	100

Sect Distribution of the Respondents

Majorly considered to be the factions or subdivisions within a single religious group, the people within the sect possess beliefs that are different from that of the larger group. The majority of the

sects identified in northern Kerala are Jama'at¹⁶, Mujahid¹⁷, Sunni AP and Sunni EK¹⁸. The present study maps the sectarian division for understanding the intersectionality in the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives and their families, along with the husbands who are working abroad. Jama'at is more focused on modernist ideas, with a comparatively greater representation of gender. They comprehend and interpret Islamic understandings in relation to modernist values. With a greater political representation, the Jama'at promotes the construction of mosques where women can offer their prayers. With a higher presence in the semi-urban and urban areas, they also have a higher media presence. Mujahids also follow the pattern of modernity, but when compared to jamaat, their ideas of gender and representation are not that progressive. These Wahabite organizations argued for *ijtihad*¹⁹ against *madhab*²⁰- based *taqleed*²¹

¹⁶ In India, Jamaat-e-Islami was also founded in 1941 by Sayd Abu-ala-Maududi and began operating in Kerala in 1948 under the direction of P.V. Muhammed Ali with a different ideological standpoint. In the context of India, the major goal of Jamaat-e-Islam is *Hukumat-e- Ilahi* (God's reign) and later shifted to *Ikmathudheen* (the establishment of Islam as revealed by God). The Jama'at holds that Muslims and Islam have a specific responsibility to create a peaceful and prosperous world, one without material exploitation, that doesn't divide the human life into separate material and spiritual spheres and one in which divine values are upheld in all spheres of society. Additionally, they strove to conform more to the Mujahid school of thought on Islamic theology and emphasised the "true" Islam concept (Miller 1992). See more in Miller, R. E. (1976). *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study of Islamic Trends*. Madras: Orient Longman.

¹⁷ In legal matters, Salafi Muslims are divided between those who, in the name of independent legal judgement (*ijtihad*), reject strict adherence (*taqlid*) to the four Sunni schools of law (*madhab*) and others who remain faithful to these, chiefly the Saudi scholars, who do not follow any specific *Madhab*. Since its inception, Salafism has been evolving through the efforts of numerous Islamic reformers, whose activities spread across various regions. In practice, Salafis believe that Muslims should rely on the Qur'an, *Sunnah*, and the *Salaf's Ijma* (consensus), which take precedence over later religious interpretations. Salafism has evolved over time, thanks to the efforts of countless Islamic reformers whose activities have spread across the globe.

¹⁸ As the etymology of the word Sunni describes, a Sunni is a Muslim who stresses the importance of the *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition) along with the Qur'an as the core basis of Islamic *Sharia* (Islamic jurisprudence) and regards all the first four Caliphs as the legitimate successors of the Prophet Muhammad. They are also known as the followers of the *sunnah* and the community (*ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah*). For a detailed description of this, see Esposito & Kalin (Eds.). (2009). Sunni AP faction is a major Sunni Muslim group in Kerala named after their spiritual leader A. P. Aboobacker Musaliyar.

¹⁹ *Ijtihad* is an Islamic legal term for independent reasoning.

²⁰ Islamic law has a school of thought known as *Madhab*, which translates to "the way to act." In order to maintain internal cohesiveness, it evolved in the first two centuries after the Prophet with the goal of unifying and regulating academic readings of Islamic texts while excluding dogmatic theologians and their dubious practises. In Sunni Islam, there are four *madhabs*: Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki. Each *madhab* is named after one of its founders.

²¹ *Taqleed* is a term used in Islam to describe how later-generation Muslims adhere to a scholar's beliefs from the first centuries following the Prophet, in this case, Imam Shafi.

Coming to the Sunni, the academic domain categories them as a conservative group; they are the traditionalists who adhere to the *thaqleed*. The majority of respondents come under the Sunni EK, constituting 41.13 per cent (124) of total respondents. 29.03 per cent (thirty-six) of respondents belong to the Jama'at. Twenty-three respondents belong to Sunni AP, and they constitute 18.55 per cent of the total respondents. Respondents from Mujahid constitute 11.29 per cent of the total respondents.

Table. 2.3 - Sects of the Respondents

Sect	Frequency	%
Jama'at	36	29.03
Mujahid	14	11.29
Sunni AP	23	18.55
Sunni EK	51	41.13
Total	124	100

Age Distribution of the Respondents

The age of the respondents, when analyzed sociologically, plays an important role in the portrayal of the informants under study. This being a part of the intersectional indices, should be viewed in relation to the factors like. How does the age of the respondent affect their access to resources, how do their gender and age work together in making them targets of accusations and appreciation etc.? The aspect of age, when juxtaposed with emotions, brings in new scope that can be studied. One can look on to understand how people belonging to various age groups and gender express emotionality differently. It varies from person to person. Age matters in terms of understanding the factors of technology as the complexity of technological understanding gets in between its effective use and the age of the user. It is to be noted that digitalization affects different groups differently. The age of the informant should be contextualized on the basis of his/her social/political/economic, and cultural backgrounds.

The respondents in this study were classified into seven age categories, with the majority of respondents coming under the age group of 36 to 40 constituting 36.29 per cent (124) of total respondents. 1.61 per cent (two) of respondents belong to the age group above forty-five. Five respondents are aged 21 to 25, constituting four per cent of the total respondents. The age group

of 26 to 30 constitutes 17.74% of the total respondents. Among the key respondents, the majority (nine key respondents) belong to the age category of 31 to 35, and the next eight key respondents belong to both the age category of 26-30 and 36-40.

Table. 2.4 - Age category of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	%
21-25	5	4.03
26-30	22	17.74
31-35	42	33.87
36-40	45	36.29
41-45	8	6.45
45+	2	1.61
Total	124	100

Educational Qualification of the Respondents

The state of Kerala has set the standard in terms of the educational infrastructure. The easy accessibility to the well-established educational infrastructure has led to an increased literacy rate in the state. Education plays a significant role in creating occupational opportunities and networks. The role of education in the socialization process cannot be undermined. Educational institutions are active agents in the making of future citizens. Gender, when read together with the institution of education, paves the way for the empowerment of the unit under study. The majority of the respondents (41.94%) have completed their matriculation, while the lowest per cent (6.45%) have less than tenth-grade schooling. Twenty-five respondents have completed their undergraduate studies in fields such as BA, BBA, and B. Com, and ten have completed their post-graduate degrees.

Table. 2.5 – Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Educational Qualification	Frequency	%
Below 10 th std	8	6.45
10 th std	52	41.94
12 th std	24	19.35
Graduation	25	20.16
Post-Graduation	10	8.06
Professional courses	5	4.03
Total	124	100

Occupation of the Respondents

The life chances and resources that are made available for a person, to a considerable extent, depend on the occupation and occupational mobility that the individual and his family possess. A good job with decent pay can lead to a life of advantages whereby the individual can afford a better standard of living, social and cultural capital and higher status in the society. In contrast, a person with a petty job and meagre income faces many limitations in terms of making a living, which will eventually affect the chances of his family members as well. Occupation of the individual can play an enabling and constraining role in their respective lives. Having said that, it is to be noted that this is not an independent factor that can be read alone to facilitate a holistic sociological understanding.

The occupation of women, in particular, is crucial in establishing not just their income but also their social position. The respondents' occupations are depicted in Table 2.6, with the majority of the respondents (104) performing household duties and being homemakers. The nine respondents work in the government sector, primarily in teaching, with four doing self-employed activities such as tailoring and three being YouTube Vloggers who specialize in cookery videos.

Table. 2.6 - Occupations of the Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	%
Homemaker	104	83.37
Private sector	7	6.14
Govt sector	9	7.26
Self-employed	4	3.23
Total	124	100

Family Structure of the Respondents

Family is the pivotal point that shapes many aspects of what makes up the lifeworld of a Left-behind wife. It is the family where she learns the construction of the ideal woman, whom she is expected to be. The family, with varying structures ranging from nuclear to extended, shapes the gendered culture that is prevalent in a patriarchal society. Hence, the focus on the family structure is significant in critically analysing the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives and their families.

According to the evidence available in the study areas, respondents live in three types of family structures: joint, nuclear, and extended. This study illustrates that the largest portion of the respondents stayed in the extended family (46.77 per cent), followed by the nuclear family (44.35 per cent) and joint family (8.87 per cent). The study also identified two residential patterns of the respondents in the study area (see Table 2.8).

Table. 2.7- Family Structure of the Respondents

Family Structure	Frequency	%
Extended	58	46.77
Joint	11	8.87
Nuclear	55	44.35
Total	124	100

The empirical underpinnings from the field cannot be understood from a standalone perspective. My study brings in people from the diverse socio-economic background who thrives in the socio-cultural milieu of northern Kerala. Their individual lived experiences should be

tracked through multiple aspects like – class, locality, sex, age, educational qualification, family structure, and religion in order to understand their shared social location, whereby the experience and the knowledge produced within the structure gain meaning.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Milieu of Malabar

The discussions on gender dynamics, sexuality, the institution of marriage and family in Malabar can well be understood with the analysis of the socio-cultural context of the region. In the course of this chapter, I have taken the socio-cultural milieu as a set of elucidatory frames that assist in understanding the meanings of gender dynamics in society and in analyzing sexuality and marriage in a particular society. The trajectory of each social phenomenon mentioned above gives us more nuanced insights and makes the study holistic. Understanding the socio-cultural context helps to explore the ‘meaning’ and construct the ‘meaning’ of the phenomenon, which is important in every sociological research. This section presents a nuanced understanding of the Malabar region’s socio-cultural perspective and discusses how socio-cultural factors, ideals, and pressures impact people’s lives in Northern Malabar. Girard, Rodgers and Chabrol (2018) note that “socio-cultural sources promote these socio-cultural ideals” (p.103). These socio-cultural factors, in their truest sense, play both ‘enabling and constraining’ in the lives of the people.

The socio-cultural context of Malabar has always been peculiar in comparison with the rest of Kerala and has received special attention due to its distinctive landscape. The terms Malabar and Northern Kerala are interchangeably used in this dissertation. To begin, consider the geography of Kerala, as described by Osella and Osella (2000):

Kerala is a narrow strip with a 580 km coastline, and an east-west spread of 120 km, covering 38,864 square km. It is bounded on the west by the Arabian Sea and separated from Tamil Nadu on the east by the high ranges of the Ghats. These are forested and plantations (tea, rubber, coffee) hills which run at an average height of 950 m, but which reach over 2000 m at several points. The land is divided by geographers and Malayalis alike into three natural longitudinal divisions: *tirapradesam*, a low-lying coastal and backwater strip; *sammatalapradesam*, a central zone from 30–200 m, characterised by red laterite soil and scrubland; and *mala pradesam* or hill/ mountain country, formerly thickly forested, now less so. Kerala has 44 rivers and many lakes, the largest of which – the Vembanad – covers 200 square km. This wealth of natural resources, yielding lush vegetation and permitting dense population settlement, has contributed to Kerala’s reputation as

‘God’s own country, a sort of earthly paradise nowadays aggressively marketed for international tourism (cf. Miller 1954; Mencher 1966a; Menon & Rajan 1989) (pp.16-17)

While looking at the historical background of Kerala, one of the renowned Kerala historians, Mohammed (2007), notes that “the historical background of Kerala would reveal that the Malabar region on the one hand and Travancore and Cochin regions on the other, had different socio-historical backgrounds leading to their present social, educational and economic status” (p.13). Each of these three regions has its unique socio-economic and cultural orientation. Malabar has been well known for the outflow of people to Gulf countries and the economic implications this has had on the region. Khan (2014), while noting down the details of the migration in Kerala, states how “for the state of Kerala and the region of Malabar it has been decades of migration now, migration of its working population to gulf countries and it has impacted in the economy and society of Kerala in general and Malabar in particular” (p.39). The phenomenon of migration has an undeniable connection with the people of Malabar, impacting various sectors, including economic, educational, social and political spheres. The remittances from these Middle Eastern countries form the backbone of the Kerala economy (Parameswaran, 2011; Prakash, 1978; Zachariah and Rajan, 2004; Zachariah and Rajan Irudaya, 2012). With regard to its perception of migration, Malabar has always received particular attention in academia as well. Malabar region is the most Muslim-populated area in Kerala. Mohammed (2007) states that the “Mappila constitute a significant part of the Kerala population” (p.14). According to another prominent historian from Kerala, Kunhali (2004), “geographically separated and culturally isolated, the ‘Mappila’ Muslims of Kerala are a little-known community in the country, though ‘Malabari’ is more familiar elsewhere in the Islamic world” (p.13).

The major goal of a marital alliance with a Gulf migrant has even been understood by a huge population as a means to achieve a better financial position. Besides, having a Gulf migrant (*‘gulfukaran’*) as a son or son-in-law at home has been considered a matter of prestige and social status in Malabar. Parents consider their daughter’s marriage to a Gulf migrant as a matter of luck, and a Gulf migrant is always preferred to a government employee. In sum, gulf migrants have a market value in Malabar’s matrimony. However, factors such as localization implemented in Gulf countries and covid pandemic have declined the trend of migrating to Middle Eastern countries for purposes of employment. Nowadays, not many young girls want to marry a Gulf migrant, and even

if they are willing to do so, that is on the condition that they accompany them to the Gulf and do not want to be left-behind at home. However, even stating such terms of the marriage with the Gulf migrant indicates her power in the family. Or to say, putting such a condition forward for the marriage from the girl depends on various contingent factors such as the girl's education, class status and much more. As the situation has changed, many Gulf migrants have now begun to take their spouses and children with them to the Gulf countries and settle there until their children reach the tenth grade. After that, some of them return to their homeland for their children's higher education, while others do not and send their children to hostels so that they can stay with their husbands in the Gulf countries. This is also an indication of their class position and other social factors, which are entirely contextual. However, it must be noted that, nowadays, despite the fact that many Gulf migrants are able to take their wives and children with them to the Gulf countries, they do not do so because of the cultural expectations imbibed amongst the people of Malabar that married women are expected to care for their spouse's older parents, the bear obligation for reproductive labour and household chores (Hsu 2014; Robinson 2007).

When it comes to Malabar's cultural setup, people have a communitarian²² spirit, and the communitarian and social bonds tend to determine and define the selves, including the ties to family or religion. Primary institutions such as the family and the neighbourhood play an important role in the social control of rural environments. The majority of Malabar regions are rural or semi-urban. Ruralism is a way of life for the Malabar people, leading to a more static society. They place a high value on religion and rituals, as well as following cultural mores, family customs, and communal traditions. As in every rural, communitarian life setup, neighbours are continually in touch with each other, sharing their daily lives and information concerning others' 'moral deviation.' However, due to the societal change induced by processes like industrialization and urbanization, this is not a common sight in the current scenario. Still, the above-mentioned rural form can be viewed as a normal phenomenon in some areas that are largely associated with rural characteristics. During the absence of men in the homes due to migration, neighbours and other relatives help the women in times of need. Sometimes, they make decisions for the women and

²² Communitarianism is a concept that gives primacy to the community in constituting the individuals (vis-à-vis individualism) and the different forms of communities (or social relations) that shape our identities in significant ways. This understanding of human nature should drive our moral and political judgements, as well as legal frameworks.

earn an influential role in family affairs in the absence of men. This nuanced socio-cultural milieu of the Malabar region is being explored in this chapter by employing data obtained from fieldwork.

2.2.1 Settlement and Production of Male Space in Malabar

One of the major factors that normalize and strengthen the patriarchy in society is the spousal preference for residing in a patrilocal residence²³. In Malabar, men dominate the household and society by typically wielding more decisive influence over economic ownership and utilization. This ends up drawing a fine line of disparity by distinguishing between the capabilities of men and women (Fakir & Abedin, 2021; Sraboni et al., 2014). Most of my respondents consider it ideal to settle in their husband's locality. They behave that it somehow elevates their status and ends up normalizing the same. The female justification in the face of their altruistic nature, where they look out for their husband's needs. Comforts and relationships further lead to the creation of superior male spaces in the cultural context of the Malabar region.

Mrs Hamna, one of my respondents, has completed her secondary schooling. Her husband has been working in Dubai for more than ten years now, says that:

I have always wanted to settle down with my husband as it's the most ideal and normal thing to do. Everyone else does the same. It's pointless to think of settling in my hometown because he is not familiar with this place. Starting everything from scratch can take a toll on him, especially when he is new here, where he may not be able to see and interact with his friends/colleagues. Building a house here is out of the question!

A 30-year-old mother of twin girls Mrs Suhana, whose husband has been working in Saudi Arabia for several years while she and her daughters reside with her in-laws, narrates:

We have sold one of my properties in my hometown to purchase 12 cents near my husband's ancestral home so that we could build a house near his place. In terms of the land value and the availability of other amenities, my place is a better option. However, we cannot do that since society sees such an act in a negative light. It is not considered appropriate and will eventually affect my husband's reputation. You know

²³ In social anthropology, patrilocal residence or virilocal residence refers to the social system in which a married couple settles near their husband's house.

how it works. Don't you? And moreover, he always wanted to stay in his hometown, where he could stay connected with his childhood friends and family.

It is important to note that most of the husbands concerned in this study live abroad for employment purposes and will remain there for quite some time. Yet the women are supposed to address things at their husband's convenience, which includes staying in their locality and dealing with everything in their absence. Even the women conform to this practice, which seems contradictory; it may be considered a result of the influence of the cultural practices existing in the Malabar society. This contributes to the visibility of men and the invisibility of women in Malabar's socio-cultural milieu. Both patrilocal residence and the patrilineal system of inheritance have an impact on this gendering process; a gender-based social structure naturally shapes women (Scaria, 2014). In this study area, I have identified two residential patterns: matrilocal and patrilocal; those who live with their husband's family or near their native place are patrilocal, while those who live with their wives or in their homes are matrilocal.

Table 2.8 shows the residential pattern of the respondents, which shows the majority of the respondents (87.1 per cent) live in patrilocality, whereas the minority live in matrilocality (12.9 per cent).

Table. 2.8 - Residential Pattern of the Respondents

Residential Pattern	Frequency	%
Matrilocal	16	12.9
Patrilocal	108	87.1
Total	124	100

I also looked into how long the couples had lived together in their hometown with their husbands and how long their husbands had been away. Looking at the average of the quantitative data, it appears that husbands spend approximately 16 months abroad and four months at home, indicating that husbands spend 1/5 of their time at home and the remaining 4/5 abroad. My point here is that, despite the fact that husbands spend a very short period at home, people care for men's comfortable space for settlement. Most men enjoy such kinds of patriarchal comforts in society. Here, I note the nuanced responses among the wives, who shared their interests regarding the

settlement, categorizing them into five groups. The first category of wives likes to settle in their husbands' hometown and have no difficulties in taking the decision and are completely satisfied with it. The second category of wives likes to settle in their own locality, while the third category likes to settle at anonymous places where they can enjoy anonymity. The fourth category is forced to settle in their husbands' locality without their liking, while the fifth one purposefully settles in their husband's locality to ensure their dignity and maintain the customary practice. These five types of responses are based on wives' socio-cultural and economic position in society.

It is interesting to note that a man settling in his wife's locality is considered to be a practice set against social norms and that the husband who is settled at his wife's locality is believed to be lacking masculinity or manliness; usages such as 'henpecked man', 'husband under her thumb' are commonly used to belittle such husbands. Even a 'well-settled' man in such a scenario is looked down upon. People from both sides (from the side of husbands and wives) do not give them appropriate status in the locality. The locality treats the man who settles down at his wives' place as a son-in-law by addressing him as '*Puyyapla*'²⁴. But this practice of calling '*Puyyapla*' is not much prevalent in contemporary society due to the changes in the family structure and the process of urbanization, which have resulted in a drastic change in the socio-cultural context of Malabar. These changes in the family structure of Indian society also call for a neolocal²⁵ residence in society. Nowadays, one can observe a change in the trend; decisions regarding settlements are made based on the infrastructural facilities like roads, hospitals, schools, supermarkets and power supply, with the addition of favourable water supply, climate and soil quality. Moreover, depending on their financial standing and employment purposes, some people prefer neolocal residences in metropolitan cities. Nevertheless, most of the people from Malabar still follow the patrilocal and patrilineal customs as against the matrilocal²⁶ and matrilineal²⁷

²⁴It is the colloquial usage majorly used by the bride's family and her locality to denote the groom. This usage will be continued even after they make a permanent settlement in her hometown.

²⁵ Neolocal residence is the one where both newly married husband and wife settle apart from both of their parents and family by giving priority to their geographical mobility as it is widely prevalent in Western countries.

²⁶ The word Matrilocal is the one that is oriented around the residence of the wife's family or people, as opposed to a patrilocal. Matrilocal is associated with matrilineal descent.

²⁷Matrilineal refers to kinship in the maternal or female line, whereas matriarchal refers to a female-dominated social structure. Matrilineality is also more widespread in cultures which follows matriarchy. In matriliney, the property passes to the daughter from the mother. The woman inherits property from her mother and passes it to her daughter

customs, except for certain regions in Kannur and Kasaragod districts and the Kuttichira²⁸ region in Kozhikode district in northern Kerala. The power relations and patterns of decision-making in the above-stated exceptional areas make up a matter for another debate altogether.

Furthermore, as per the customary practices in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts, except for the Kuttichira region, when the family property is partitioned among siblings, the *tarawaad* (family home) usually goes to the sons. Once daughters are married off, they are considered to be a part of their in-laws' family. Usually, when the parents get old, they end up living with whomever the *tarawad* belongs to. Even when the *tarawad* is sold or utilized for some other purpose, the parents tend to spend their old age with the son's family; living with their daughter is not an option that they choose for themselves. As per the standard practice, the daughter's house belongs to the son-in-law, due to which the parents are hesitant to spend their old age there. Older parents with a son and daughter also follow the same practice. In the absence of sons or other people to support them, some parents are forced to stay with their daughters' families. Other reasons for living with daughters come up when they are not on good terms with their daughters-in-law. Parents don't make efforts to mend the troubled relationships with their daughters-in-law, which can turn against them when they grow older and become more dependent on their children and daughters-in-law, where the latter may not even encourage their visits or prolonged stays. Barring these exceptional cases, the old parents usually stay with the son. All of this produce and perpetuate the male space in the rural setting of Malabar.

If the parents have a male son, they are disparaged while staying at the daughters' (son-in-law's home) house permanently or for a longer period. All throughout their stay, they keep lamenting how disgraced they felt while staying at their son-in-law's home. Ayisha Beevi, the

while a man controls his sister's property and passes on control to his sister's son. This inheritance passes from mother to daughter whereas control passes for maternal uncle to nephew.

²⁸Thekkepuram is another name for Kuttichira. The Arabian Sea in the west, railway tracks in the east, the Kallayi River in the south, and Silk Street in the north characterize Thekkepuram as an area. Thekkepuram is known for its distinct cultural legacy and centuries-old towns. It was a region consisting of more than 200 large *tharawads*, with many *bhagams* in each *tharawad*. The matrilocal system is followed by these families that live in and around Thekkepuram. The matrilocal relationship between the members and the family is unchanged by relocating the residence. The relocations were made for the sake of physical and infrastructural conveniences. They also choose to relocate households with a high concentration of matrilocal. (See more in Mohamad, H. (2010). *Socio-Economic Determinants of the Continuity of Matrilocal Family System Among Mappila Muslims of Malabar* (Doctoral dissertation, Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology).

mother of one of the Left-behind wives, who is over sixty years old and currently, resides at her daughter's home in Kozhikode, reveals:

I feel guilty for staying at my son-in-law's place. No one has ever expressed any dislike regarding this issue. Yet, being the mother of two sons, I find it inappropriate to stay with my son-in-law. What will people think of me and my family? Neither of my sons had invited me to stay with them in their place. As per the norms of society, parents are supposed to stay with their sons and not their daughters. It's disgraceful for our tarawaad. It is not respectable. I am concerned about my neighbours. What will they be thinking of me?

Another key informant's mother-in-law named Kadeesakutty, who is sixty-three years old and mother of three sons and one daughter, staying with the youngest son's family, expresses her opinions:

After my husband's death, we sold our house for the purpose of partitioning. My sons, all three of them, settled in places where there is a good water supply. Due to the lack of clean drinking water in our locality, none of my sons were willing to take the property there. I usually prefer to stay with my youngest son's family and rarely pay a visit to my daughter's place. They always try to persuade me to stay for an extended period. I don't find it ideal to live with my daughter. Maternal families should know their limits. They are not supposed to depend on their son in laws earnings. It is not impressive at all.

The attitude of the elderly people in Malabar towards the question of settlement, which results in the production of male spaces, can be easily comprehended in such a structure. Most elderly people choose to live with their sons' families rather than their daughters' families and regard this as a matter of cultural decency, something that is ideal, and this can be regarded as a reflection of society's existing patriarchal elements. Patriarchy is a social system where men exert a monopoly over the social, cultural, and political domains of society, thereby treating women as second-class citizens (Sebastian, 2016). According to J. Devika, women are expected to project themselves as humble, submissive, and in need of protection (Pillai, 2015). A change cannot be expected until men relinquish their patriarchal comforts and renounce their enslaving mindset towards women, which can be accomplished by imparting education with a strong thrust on gender justice in the school system and by sensitizing the families to the same. (Sebastian, 2016).

Moreover, I have also noticed that even young married men hesitate to stay at their wives' homes for an extended period. Their visits are normally limited to two or three days. Young married men believe that staying at wife's homes for a longer period project them as an individual with low self-esteem and lacking respect. One of the respondents, named Nasla, 31 years old, a graduate and a mother of two children whose husband has been working in Qatar, explains her husband's approach and attitude towards staying at her home for more than two to three days as:

My hubby spends not more than two to three days at my house. However, he has no objections to my sons and myself staying at my house for a long period. He does not stay at my house because he feels it is a matter of low self-esteem. It is rare to find my husband staying at my house for more than three days. He raises no objections when I stay there with my sons for a longer period of time. He is very conscious of what others think. He says that staying with his in-laws will eventually affect his self-respect, and people will start questioning his dignity. If I persuaded him to remain at my house, he would ask me if I wanted him to look like a person with poor self-esteem in front of my family and neighbours.

Here it must be noted that the informant's husband is an educated person who has completed his graduation from a central university. Despite his high educational level, he continues to reinforce certain customs due to the patriarchal system. He demonstrates his manly dignity in front of his spouses' family in a passive manner. Another informant, Hawwa, 28 years old and mother of one child who stays with her in-laws, states that her husband, a software engineer who constantly travels to the United States and other countries for business meetings, still believes that a wife's primary responsibility is to raise the children, cook, clean, and to look after his parents.

The cultural setup of Malabar is designed in such a way that it becomes the responsibility of the son's family to take care of the ageing parents. The daughter is not expected to do the same, and this comes down as an unwritten common practice. Any failure to offer protection to the old parents brews trouble in the neighbourhood. At the same time, it is not a matter of concern for the public if daughters do not take care of their own parents after marriage. But the situation is blown out of proportion when they ignore their husbands' parents. In sum, most elderly parents who have

sons prefer to stay with their sons' families when they are at ease. It is all part of a system which enforces patriarchy consciously and unconsciously as ingrained in the social psyche.

In the following section, I examine Malabar's social institutions with a focus on family and marriage and investigate the ways in which they help reinforce the conception of an 'ideal woman.'

2.2.2. Social Institutions as Carriers of Culture

Indians are socially and culturally rooted as against the Westerners. A person's status and role are determined by geography, religion, caste, class, gender, and the political environment, which play a significant part in an individual's day-to-day life. Culture and cultural patterns have significant power in shaping all aspects of human social life (Campos & Kim, 2017; Conklin, 1979; Kemper, 1981). In Campos and Kim's words (2017):

Culture is defined as a dynamic system with loosely organized but often causally connected elements (e.g., meanings and practices) that provide the information and knowledge needed to skillfully navigate one's social environments. (p.543)

There have been multiple interpretations of culture, followed by an enriching set of literature on culture and gender. Geertz (1973) defines culture as a system of inherited conceptions articulated in symbolic ways the means by which humans interact, maintain, and cultivate their awareness of and attitudes towards life. Markman, Grimm, and Kim (2009) state that "cultures are knowledge traditions" (p.93). Lyon (1995) perceives culture as the root of actual phenomena that defines the very structure and stance of human life. There are various social institutions which act as bearers of cultural elements or advocate the meaning and practices of cultural elements. In short, it is necessary to look at "the meaning of culture as process and product" (Malinowski, 1960, p.5). Cultural knowledge is distinct across the regions. To put it a different way, various cultures may have similar sets of knowledge, but they may use it differently (Wyer, Chiu & Hong). Social institutions on which each culture is embedded can provide insight into that particular culture, and each culture's social institutions bear the cultural elements of that community. Menon (2012) claims that when it comes to family:

The role of the family as an institution in the Indian scenario as a whole in entrenching values of caring and nurturing has often been projected comparatively to argue that the strong family values in India create healthy individuals and that

the absence of such values impair individuals and are a liability to social security and individual personality development and the health of society. (p.49)

In a nutshell, social norms and conventions are impacted by culturally entrenched family norms and traditions, which further impact the everyday lives of women. Furthermore, familial socialization leads to the formation of a gendered division of labour both within the family and in the public sphere (Gallo, 2008). Family and marriage are crucial in maintaining the cultures and traditions of a society; culture shapes and reshapes these institutions, and the institutions adhere to the society's ideals and ideas.

2.2.2.1 Family and Marriage

Two entwined concepts, Family and marriage, are dependent on one another. Steiner and Bansil (1989) argue that India follows an enclosed family pattern that dominates all aspects of life. An agency of primary socialization, people are beginning to learn the ideas of gender relations, cultural values and beliefs from the family itself. Everybody produces and reproduces their thoughts and performs their tasks according to their family setup; therefore, they develop their thoughts on the respective families that they belong to. Despite the variations according to social class, ethnicity, religious background, age and gender (Rodger & Campling, 1996), each family is unique in its own ways, and it differs based on the cultural system that binds them. Not only family but each social institution also varies, conforming to the cultural and social environment (Malinowski, 1913). In other words, social institutions like family, marriage, religion, etc., are not to be interpreted outside of the social and cultural context.

Familial relationships, functions and structure of social institutions and emotionality associated with particular sex have been shaped according to the cultural setup. Lutz (1988) attempts to demonstrate how the everyday activities of women are “fundamentally structured by particular cultural systems and particular social and material environments” (p.5). In this research, I examine how families produce and reproduce cultural values by specifically looking at the experiences of the Left-behind wives and considering how they internalize the cultural norms. One can also see how a woman is ‘made’ through family and marriage. Mullati (1995) notes that girls are taught to be submissive, pious, and different compared to boys from a young age. Lutz (1988) discusses women as a “less powerful gender with culturally devalued characteristics” (p.16). A

closer look at some of the details gathered through my fieldwork regarding the construction of 'womanhood' and 'femininity' will illustrate my concerns.

One of the key respondents named, Mrs Jumaila, who is a 37 years old woman and a mother of three children belonging to a neolocal family in Malappuram and has completed secondary education, recalls her experience. She says:

My parents used to consistently nag me with their expectations of being a good wife. They wanted me to be able in such a way that I would be on point with the household chore and presentations. Despite having exams, I was compelled to perform cooking and cleaning chores at home. Any objection to this demand ended up gaining me responses regarding a perplexed future, such as how will you adjust in your husband's place post-marriage. Food is love, and if you provide delicious food for them, their family will definitely love you. Better learn to cook and serve delicious cuisine for your own good.

She goes on to describe her daughter's current situation:

I have two sons and one daughter. My daughter, whose age for marriage is approaching, is now hearing all her grandparents' comments on being a 'perfect woman'. The persistent preaching of this idealistic conception is getting on her head such that she is getting reluctant to visit them, even during the holidays. It's the same tale for her at my in-law's place too.

The family initiates the process of making an 'ideal woman' from childhood itself. They engage in this by oppressing women explicitly or implicitly, from within or without, intentionally or unintentionally, and thus end up constructing femininity and masculinity. As a primary agency of socialization, the family inculcates normative male responses and female responses among both males and females. Mullatti (1995) perfectly highlights this normative behaviour and says that the children follow the model created by their elders who have sacrificed a great deal in the name of love for their respective families. This is something that goes beyond the moralistic notion that the books can contain.

Overall, the extent of the role of the family in constructing and imbibing 'culturally specific' ideas into the minds of children is crystal clear. Family acts as one of the carriers of the process of

institutionalization of gender. I don't intend to argue; however, family is one of the sources of toxicity. Contrary to this, a growing number of families these days encourage their children by positively promoting the concepts of the self, gender, dignity and community.

Mrs Raihanath, a key respondent from Kozhikode district, currently residing with her husband's family with a son and a daughter, says:

Whenever I need any assistance with domestic duties, I usually call upon my daughter. She always insists on calling her brother as well. It is not respectable for men to engage in household tasks. It brings bad luck. This is something that my grandparents taught me, and I still practice it.

The situation is analogous to that of many of my interviewees. Mrs Sakeena, another respondent from the Malappuram district, demonstrates:

I was bedridden when my husband visited us for a two-month vacation from Kuwait. I was not able to perform any single work at home. My husband cleaned the home and cooked the food for me and my daughter, who was only two years old at that time. My mother-in-law, despite knowing my condition, insisted that her son shouldn't be doing the household tasks, especially something like touching a broom, for it may impede prosperity and bring poverty.

The narratives from the respondents mentioned above help us know more about the gendered attitudes towards domestic work, which manifests in the established internalized patriarchal system. It would seem that certain beliefs with regard to gender are deeply ingrained in our value system and that the value system is profoundly embedded in and rigorously followed by patriarchal nature. Older generations are more rigid in their desire to conduct their daily affairs in accordance with their values and preferences. Thus, anyone from the new generation, who is ready to deconstruct and reconstruct the notions regarding domestic work, will face the structural constraints within the family because the majority of the old generation is not ready to compromise on the established gender patterns and regimes, which feed patriarchy. The respondents' experiences shed light on the part of gender ideology and appropriation of domestic work in the family realm (Carriero & Todesco, 2018; Parkman, 2004). West and Zimmerman (1987) find that

“doing gender involves a complex of socially guided, perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘*natures*’” (p.126).

Kuttichira, a region in the district of Kozhikode where matrilocality is practised, portrays a different picture. The Muslim women in Kuttichira hold a distinctive place in their families. All Muslim families in Kuttichira follow the matrilineal system of inheritance, in which descent is traced through the maternal line. It provides a social framework in which one inherits surname, property, etc., from one’s mother’s lineage. This maternal line is known as *Marumakkathayam*²⁹. The key element that suggests Kuttichira Muslims to be a matriarchal section is the economic shift that is traced through the maternal line. Highlighting this point, Saradamoni (1999) states that “women under matriliney had a permanent place in their natal homes. Wherever they lived after marriage, for which there was neither uniformity nor rigidity, at least by the mid-nineteenth century, their birthright in the *taravad* did not change” (p.14). Saradamoni, citing Leela Dube (1997), points out that under patriliney, a daughter is treated as a temporary member until she marries and leaves her natal household.

Coming to the social aspect of the matrilocal system, I have learned from the responses of women in the fieldwork that they get a sense of dignity, respect and security by staying in their homes. In the matrilocal setup, they say that they are not trained to be ‘good cooks’ nor are they asked to have ‘decent behaviour’ as compared to the patrilocal system. Since they stay in their own houses most of the time and are ‘guests’ in their husband’s houses, they are entitled to prestige and status in society. They have a role in decision-making and are not treated as second-class family members. My informant from the matrilocality in Kuttichira emphasizes that their system protects them from domestic abuse and violence. The system gives them power because, unlike the wives who stay in their husband’s homes, these wives do not need to consult with ‘others’ while taking decisions. However, it must also be noted that even they are not supposed to exercise the power of decision-making beyond a point. In theory, matriarchy is a woman-centred society, while in

²⁹*Marumakkathayam* points to the matrilineal system of inheritance in which lineage, descent and property inheritance are traced back to women. This system is followed by all Nair castes, as well as some *Ambalavasis*, *Mappilas*, and tribal communities. The family lives together in a *tharavadu* in the *Marumakkattayam* system, which consists of a mother, her brothers and younger sisters, and her children. The *karanavar*, the oldest brother, is the head of the family and administers the family estate. Historians believe that the origins of this system can be traced back to polyandry in ancient Malabar. *Taravad* is a matrilineal joint family that formed the nucleus of Malabar society. *Marumakkathayam* denotes the system of inheritance in which descent is traced to the female line, and *Marumakkattayee* implies a person regulated by *Marumakkathayam Law of Inheritance*, according to the Madras *Marumakkattayam* Act 1932.

practice, it is a man-centred society (Jeffrey, 2004; Menon, 2012; Saradamoni, 1999). For them, the reality on the ground is quite different. In that sense, one can say that patriarchy is an age-old delusion, and matriarchal households offer a paradox in terms of theory and practice, especially in Kerala. While the matrilineal family is praised and romanticized in numerous Malayalam films and literature, the real-life shreds of evidence expose the patriarchal elements imbibed in their system.

Malabar is primarily a patriarchal society in nature, and its cultural components promote patriarchal prescriptions. Women are socialized to value the home plot, domesticity, and domestic matrimony, or at the very least, to favour patriarchal structures in society (Kodoth & Eapen, 2005). Patriarchy has been viewed as a worldwide, trans-historical, and trans-cultural phenomenon by radical feminists, where women are subjected to subjugation in various ways (Acker, 1989). Several writers and activists have openly spoken on Kerala's disguised hypocrisy and structured grammar of gender (Devika, 2007; Kodoth & Eapen, 2005; Saradamoni, 1994; Sreekumar, 2009). Women are subjected to 'disinterested objectivity' in Kerala (Sreekumar, 2009), and they experience invisible and covert patriarchy where they are denied complete autonomy in Kerala's cultural society. Even the migration of men to Gulf countries does not, in and of itself, enable women to exercise autonomy in a holistic sense. I mean to say that, even in the absence of men, women play only a symbolic role in family affairs while men play the real role. Towards the end, I will elucidate how in the contemporary period, men used technological devices to dominate women in familial relations. The point I want to stress in this portion is that the importance of family and kinship structures in understanding gender relations and dynamics in society cannot be underplayed. In the following section, I look at how the cultural elements imbibed in social institutions such as family and marriage help in producing a gendered public sphere and how the Left-behind wives are subjected to that space.

2.3. Construction of the Gendered Culture

The concepts like gender and culture have always earned a great deal of attention in sociological academia. Both concepts are entwined with each other and associated with the production of social relationships. Moreover, culture reflects society and influences the role of gender in every society. Social constructs and gender roles are inextricably linked to culture. The notion of culture is relational, cumulative and varies in accordance with each society. Every society has its own culture

and cultural elements, including habits, behaviours, norms, language, cuisine, art, music, etc. Here I analyze how culture is involved in the constitution of gender and gender relations, and I use the cultural constructionist approach for the analysis. Lyon (1995) makes the following observation:

Within the cultural constructionist approach, categories of thought (and thus the ideas we have), how we talk (and thus we say), our experiences and feelings, and what we express and do are primarily determined by the culture in which we live. From this perspective, culture is the source and the locus, to use a more sociological language of the norms, values, and rules, the internalized “guidelines”, in terms of which we live. (p. 244)

Individuals internalise certain standards and guiding principles according to our living society. The way that people communicate, dress, and eat is tied to their actions and reactions based on cultural factors. Despite these overarching principles, every cultural civilization engages in gendered behaviours and practises. Each community has its own set of laws and expectations for men and women. Whether they are men, women, or transgender, people (re)act in accordance with the "social jackets." Cultural background, customs, physical region, and family history all define gender roles.

The conception of ‘gendered culture’ is a product of the interplay between culture and gender. Gender is basically a social outcome defined by a particular social environment. Each gender is expected to perform in a particular manner with respect to their behaviour, norms and actions. These particular norms, actions and behaviours develop according to the cultural society. Thus, the notion of gender also comes from the complex wholesome of culture, and culture is a lens to discover society and its standards. Culture is merely a social product, and it conforms to societal values and norms. Culture and society are inseparably linked to each other and cannot exist without the other (Banerjee, 2008; Sinha & Kumar, 2004; Williams, 1983). The phenomenon of ‘gendered culture’ is the outcome of ‘doing gender’ in cultural society, and the cultural society possesses some distinct features of its own which are different from the other. According to the features of each cultural society, gender appropriates the notion of one’s sex category. There exists no universal standard for ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ in each society. There is a gendered power relation between men, women and the third gender in society. The presence of the third gender and their growing acceptance in society can be seen as a notion that challenges the gender binary in society.

The ways of 'doing gender' are shaped by social norms, rules and standards, and gender is an interactional process in the social environment. With the impact of the process of 'doing gender', all of us have a sense of 'gender'; the process of doing gender prevails due to the presence of the normative attitudes and actions appropriate for one's sex category, gender expectations and gender stereotypes in society. People are affected by the process of "doing gender," which results from gendered thinking, behaviours, and attitudes. For instance, women will always be responsible for taking care of household duties and meeting social expectations for homemakers. Even when both partners are employed, the woman continues to remain solely responsible for taking care of the home and performing household duties whether she chooses to remain a homemaker or pursue a career.

Simone de Beauvoir (1956) makes a contrast between 'nature' and 'nurture' in relation to how gender is formed. According to her, men 'nurture' or 'transcend' themselves and the outside world, whereas women are confined to 'nature.' Women are bound to private spaces, while men reach out to the world and alter its character by forcing their will or force on the external universe. She (1956) says: "It is men wanting to maintain masculine prerogatives who invented this division; they wanted to create a feminine domain—a rule of life, of immanence—only to lock a woman in it" (p, 77). She claims that the women became subservient to men because they were reduced to the simple, repetitive, and immanent processes of reproduction and childrearing as opposed to the men, who transcended to the outside world, took risks rather than gave birth, and engaged in risky activities like fishing and hunting. Here, I want to discuss De Beauvoir's idea of the creation of gender categories in the context of men leaving their wives behind in Malabar to migrate and explore new opportunities. This trend of men moving about more than wives remaining in their houses reinforces, as per Beauvoir, her subjection and servitude.

Normative conceptions of activities and behaviour are challenging to gender categories and their attitude towards societal expectations. Women become the victims of the normative conceptions in society, whereas men enjoy traditional prestige and accountability (De Beauvoir, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Sex-role socialization has an essential role in the making of 'woman' and 'man' in the social system and reflects on every stage of the life cycle of human beings. Butler (1990) deconstructs the category of 'woman' in the conventional feminist discourse

and asserts that gender is performative; through certain ways of repeated performances and doings based on dominant social norms, gender is reinforced.

In Butler's words (1990), "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (p.33). For Butler, gender is neither essential nor biologically determined, rather, it is created by the very performances of gender, and hence it is performative. Also, she argues that gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts; rather, it is constituted discursively by many intersectional factors or variants such as race, class, ethnicity, sex, and region. It thus becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (p.6). Suppose Butler's theory of gender performativity is posed in the context of the Left-behind wives in Kerala; their certain ways of performing and doing as the Left-behind wives produce the category called Left-behind wives. In other words, by repeatedly doing, acting and performing, the Left-behind wives are produced. To put it more clearly, the unconscious or sub-conscious reiteration of norms which shape or mould women to do certain kinds of deeds like speaking or dressing up in a certain way in itself produces the notion of *gulfukarante bharya*.

2.3.1 Gendered Culture through Literature and Media

In a revolutionary era of information and communication technology, it is needless to mention how the individual and collective selves are produced through literature, discourses and narratives. Both the literature and media play a significant role in every cultural transmission and dissemination of certain specific values to the people. It has been very well understood by now how certain worldviews and ideologies get dominant and are profoundly established in the world through the media and literature in a way that they end up determining what is good and bad, positive and negative, moral and immoral (Kellner, 1995). The prevailing morals and philosophies have been reinforced by literature and media (Manovich, 2002). The literature and media, including films, television and radio programs, have become crucial tools for constructing and circulating the hegemony in modern society. In the book *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Louis Althusser (1971) discusses this in one of the chapters entitled "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses

(Notes towards an investigation).” He discussed the ISA³⁰ (Ideological State Apparatus) and RSA³¹ (Repressive State Apparatus); in this particular section, I am taking note of the ISA.

Louis Althusser counts Communication ISA like press, radio, television, and Cultural ISA like literature, arts and sports among the eight Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and shows how the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology’ (Louis & Ben, 1971). His point is that the communication ISAs are not merely meant for news and information as much as the cultural ISAs are not merely about culture; they regulate and limit our consciousness, thoughts and perceptions and produce and function by an ideology and later spread it. Althusser (1970) says: “Media, like the judiciary, is one of the sites on and through which ideology is constructed and circulated” (p.143). The mass media act as an agent of social control and produce certain specific interests of the people, community and society at large (Nišić & Plavšić, 2014). In a normal sense, we might say that mass media and literature replicates and mirrors society. However, one must also realize that society, social reality and ideologies are produced by the media. That is to say; there is a mutually constitutive relation between the media, literature and culture. Oakes (1992) identifies that “social reality is constituted, recognized and celebrated with media” (p.441).

After the revolution of information and communication technology, the impact of the media on human-social life has been much higher in the past few decades than in the previous two centuries. According to Oakes (1992), “mass media are the most powerful forces in the contemporary world, substituting reiteration for precision and redundancy for analysis” (p.461). The media culture influences people in the construction and consumption of what is good and bad, positive and negative and moral and immoral and reinforces the dominant understandings of the world (Nišić & Plavšić, 2014). The media imagery encodes certain messages according to its concerns and agendas and influences the creation of mental pictures that the audience makes. The

³⁰ Ideological state apparatuses, on the other hand, operate beneath the veil of morality and ethics. Ideological state apparatuses vary from repressive state apparatuses in that they do not use violence. Educational institutions, religious institutions, families, media organisations, trade unions, cultural groups, political groups, legal groupings, and so on are all examples. The dominant ideology always dominates the set of ideological discourses at work in all ideological state apparatuses. The educational institution, according to Althusser, lies at the heart of ideological state apparatuses. The church was earlier used to influence people's brains in the past, but today, it is the school that teaches morality and ethics to children. In ideological state apparatuses, ruling ideologies are not free. As a result, they form subjects.

³¹ The state is the repressive machinery, according to Althusser. It is a repressive mechanism that allows the ruling class to dominate the working class. This is performed through the use of police, courts, jails, government, and administration. When an individual or a group of individuals challenges the state's dominant ideology, the latter resorts to coercive state institutions to maintain control. These devices are invariably violent.

media shape and reshape people's values, beliefs, ideology, consciousness and perceptions as social beings. The advertisements have a potentially significant role to play in (re)constructing public consciousness, including gendered relations and gender roles in society. Media and advertisements are generally used in the industry to perpetuate the sexual, emotional and psychological stereotypes related to females in society (Chisholm, 2014). The intersections of caste, class, religion and region add their own role as well. According to Sutkutè (2019), "media as an institution forming stereotypes depends on the local socio-cultural context" (p.59). In sum, media normalizes manipulated information and inequality, spreads dogmatic agendas and constructs reality according to its purposes in society (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004).

Emphasizing the mutually constitutive relation between stereotypes and social reality, Lu, Liu, Liao, and Wang (2020) make an important point. He says: "stereotypes and social reality are mutually reinforcing... it is often unclear whether a given stereotype has emerged from preexisting social reality, or has shaped social reality over time to resemble the stereotype" (p.1). Thus, a debate regarding which comes first, stereotypes or social realities, is similar to debating on whether the chicken or egg came first (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Tappin, McKay & Abrams, 2017). The point of emphasis here is that this issue derives from the fact that all stereotypes arise from social reality and vice versa. Lu, Liu, Liao, and Wang (2020) conclude with a concrete demonstration that "stereotypes can form without preexisting social reality, yet still produce discrimination that can then shape social reality. In other words, the egg (stereotype) can be born without the chicken (social reality), and yet still hatch into the chicken" (p.17). Stereotypes and prejudices can also arise due to cultural assimilation (Heine & Thakur, 2011; Lu, Liu, Liao, and Wang, 2020; Lu, Quoidbach, Gino, Chakroff, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2017).

Nišić and Plavšić (2014) argue that the media has an influence not only on individuals but also on society as a whole, as a place where man meets his individual needs, pursues his desires, and discovers (or loses) his opportunities, skills, and innovations. The media not only reflects reality but also '(re)produces' the dominant cultural order and (re)makes social attitudes and social comparisons. According to Nišić and Plavšić, (2014):

The media have the manifest role, to present a reality that is accompanied by hidden agendas and interests. The media through the manifest intention of informing society (providing not only information, but also some forms of entertainment), actually latently construct the reality according to their intentions, or intentions of

some, visible or hidden, social entities, through manipulating human needs (safety, security, livelihood, promotion, development, competition) and through them they control the individuals and groups. (pp.74-75)

The mass media do have both manifest and latent functions in society. While the manifest functions are easily observed as consequences of the media in society, like spreading political rumours and some forms of entertainment, the latent functions are supporting the status quo by strengthening and reinforcing the existing values and ideals in society (Merton, 1968). By enabling the hegemonic control over the circulations of information and legitimizing the information, both latent and manifest functions of media (re)produce social order and dominant societal ideas in the society.

Middleton, Turnbull, and de Oliveira (2020) specifically analyze the complex and subtle cultural specificities that affect the creative judgment of professionals when it comes to female role depictions, exposing their understanding of the role and responsibilities of such stereotypes in media. Gender stereotypes are often reiterated in the media, depending on the cultural framework of the society. Muslim women are exploited by the regional culture, directly and indirectly, from within and without. The mass media has often portrayed the Left-behind Muslim women as ‘vulnerable’, ‘uncivilized’, and ‘oppressed’ women in society, especially with regard to specific regions such as Malabar. My intention hitherto in this section has been to put forth a theoretical ground to largely examine how society is constituted by mediated (media) reality and how social reality is produced and established through the mediation of the literature and media. In other words, the intention has been to show how the gendered culture is produced and perpetuated through the literature and media.

With this theoretical background, I aim to concentrate on how the media-literature culture played a critical role in featuring the Left-behind wives as ‘*gulfukarante bharya*’ (‘gulf wife’) in the public sphere in the following section.

2.3.2. Left-behind wives in ‘Home Cinemas’

Print and digital media have traditionally utilised and objectified women to promote viewership and circulation. Media attention has traditionally focused on women and their sexuality. This section seeks to explore how specifically the Left-behind wives are represented in print and digital media, especially in "Home cinemas." The Left-Behind Wives are portrayed by the mainstream

media as an unimpressive category, subordinate subject, and vulnerable group. In society, they are portrayed by the media as being ‘sexually thirsty and available.’ The stereotype of Left-behind wives as docile, passive subjects is frequently maintained in public discourses, and society expects this docility and passivity in return from them. They are constructed as ‘passive’ subjects in society with unethical experiential realities in their lifeworld without being able to dissent. The in-depth interviews with the Left-behind wives throw light on the various ways in which the husband’s absence exposes the wives to fragile physical, mental, and social conditions. The Left-behind spouses have always been a ‘hot topic’ in newspaper articles and web portal news in Kerala, although it should be emphasised that they have not yet become a popular ‘hot’ theme in mainstream movies. In this section, I demonstrate how Kerala’s popular “home cinemas” of the 2000s, which considerably entertained the Muslim population, have played a big role in creating and maintaining the ‘sexually thirsty and sexually available’ Left-behind wives in society.

The home films are enriched with comedy, humour, satire, and ethical decisions imitating conventional Indian cinema in typesetting and have become popular among a wider Muslim community. For a wider audience, home cinemas provide insight into the community’s domestic life. Televisions are now ubiquitous, and television owners’ homes are often crammed with extended family and friends gathered for an evening of movie-watching with their families (Musadhique, 2016). Musadhique (2016) says that the reason for the acceptance of home cinemas among the Muslim community was due to the fact that “Mappilas are not theatergoers for religious reasons. So, these home movies were not meant for release in theatres but were released directly in the Mappila household in the form of video cassettes, CDs and DVDs” (p.114). Abdelhalim (2016) expresses his thoughts on the emergence of home movies in his book entitled *Indian Muslims and Citizenship: Spaces for Jihād in Everyday Life*:

Home cinema refers to independent movies in Kerala made with a small budget, and always revolves around a Muslim family and themes related to Muslims. The main reason for the proliferation of these movies is the rigidly conservative stance of Muslim scholars against cinema halls, and movies that carry either anti-Islamic ideas or indecency. The idea behind home cinema is that people buy DVDs and watch them in their own homes with their families. Such enterprise gives space to women to occupy new roles, traditionally tabooed or signified inappropriate. The new spaces are not emerging just in home cinema, with Muslim actresses, but in songs and music videos. (pp. 162-163)

Karinkurayil (2019) also gives the reasons behind the home cinema movement:

Home Cinema, synonymous in its beginning with the films of Salam Kodiyathur³², began as an attempt to oppose what was perceived as the immoral qualities of mainstream cinema, both global and regional. As a counter to the mainstream, Kodiyathur attempted to formulate Islamic cinema but in the idiom of a strand of mainstream Malayalam cinema. (p.30)

After 2000, 'Home Cinema' became a common genre. It is primarily set in the Muslim environs of north Kerala and focuses on the phenomenon of migration of people from Malabar to the gulf. (Karinkurayil, 2019). By 2010, many Home movies³³ were released in the Malabar region, sparking a number of religious discussions (Musadhique, 2016). The films, which are concerned with social change among Kerala's Muslim community, also refract the experience of migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, especially by narrating an emotional landscape characterized by precarious labour conditions, racialized hierarchy, and risk philosophy (Menon, & Sreekumar, 2016). The Muslim community in Kerala was greatly impressed with home movies, mostly because they thought that the social life of the community was realistically depicted and that the movies were directly related to their culture and lived experiences. Musaddique identifies the home cinemas with the Mappila dialect (Musadhique, 2016).

Home movies make up a significant theme in my thesis not simply because of their depiction of the Left-behind wives but also because of their engagement with migration. It portrays migrants as complicated emotional beings who are influenced by rational economism and choice (Menon & Sreekumar, 2016; Sreekumar & Menon, 2013). These emotional aspects of the migrant men need to be read along with the following section, where I analyze the Left-behind wives through the lens of the sociology of emotion. In another sense, the phenomenon of migration brings in an intricate social-emotional landscape for both the migrant men and their Left-behind wives. This complexity of life is advertised and entertained in many home cinemas. But the majority of

³²Salam Kodiyathur, a school teacher by profession, self-financed his first film, *Ningalenne Branthanaakki*, in 2000 with a meagre budget of \$100,000. The VHS-format film was distributed via video rental stores in the surrounding areas. As a result, the film only had a small audience. In 2004, *Parethan Thirichu Varunnu* marked a turning point in his career (Karinkurayil, 2019).

³³ I am using the terms Home cinemas, Home movies and Home videos interchangeably.

the mainstream media pays little attention to Gulf expatriate's wives and their emotional geography; as a result, this study makes an effort to demonstrate its significance.

Menon and Sreekumar (2016) argue that the troubled experiences of the Left-behind wives with isolation and alienation of labour, struggles and uncertainties of immigrant life are all part of the emotional geography of the home videos. Musadhique (2016) notes:

These home movies are from an indigenous community and they try to document the community life into frame. Hence it presents a new aesthetic framework to the media culture in Kerala. Despite their Islamic nature, these movies were not appreciated even by Muslims outside Malabar, because of its very regionalistic dialect and culture. (p.125)

It need not be said that the daily issues of the Muslim community, such as dowry issues, gulf returns and solitude of the wives of gulf expatriates, are the general themes of the home cinemas (Musadhique, 2016). In short, Home videos are primarily the only source of 'entertainment' for women who are left-behind as they are mostly based on their own lives.

A significant point of home cinemas' stress is the immoral/unethical life of the Left-behind wives. The following section tries to analyze the Left-behind wives portrayed in home cinemas directed by Salam Kodyathur, a synonym of the home cinemas, who concentrated on the issues of domestic abuse, allegations of extramarital affairs, and cultural stereotypes about them. The Home cinemas, to name a few, *Kudumbakalaham Nooram Divasam* (Family Quarrel: 100th Day), *Pathiyathrakoru ticket* (Ticket for a Half Journey), *Aliyanoru Free Visa* (A Free Visa for the Brother-in-Law), *Parethan Thirichu Varunnu* (The Deceased Returns) provides entertainment by portraying the Left-behind wives negatively and in a derogatory sense. Musadhique (2016) examines the representation of women in Home cinema in his dissertation:

If we take the stories of home movie and its women characters, only a few films, such as *Kudumbakalaham Nooramdivasam* have portrayed women relatively positively. The general impression is that women are negatively portrayed to appeal to the male dominated audience. The filmmakers do not seem to be aware of the shifting paradigm in women's discourse. Consequently, some films are gender insensitive, and many still abide by the traditional and conservative attitude toward women. Women are portrayed in most films as at best courtesans, devious lovers etc. (p.139)

According to Musadhique (2016), in this sense, home cinemas reinforce gender stereotypes and represent the patriarchal social values that prevail in society, and as a result, the ‘objectification’ of women in these home movies is frequently contested. Needless to say, Muslim women are doubly stereotyped and are subjected to derogatory portrayals more often as women and as Muslim women who wear the veils, the ‘secular’ markers of the persecution of Muslim men.

Let me now examine the portrayal of the Left-behind wives in numerous home videos, most of which are directed by Salam Kodiyathur. Women were represented as subservient and susceptible to all forms of domestic violence in the home films *Parethan Thirichu Varunnu* (The Deceased Returns) and *Aliyan Oru Free Visa* (A Free Visa for the Brother-in-Law). Movies such as *Nashtapariharam* (Compensation), *Aanayittorayalvasi* (A Male Neighbour), *Kudumbakalaham* *Nooram Divasam* (Family Quarrel: 100th Day), *Varane Vilkanundu* (Bridegroom on Sale), *Oru Teaspoon Veetham Moonnu Neram* (One Teaspoon for Three Times) are not better in this regard. The female characters in these home videos are not entirely absent; rather, they play supportive roles, such as the mother, wife, or sister of the hero. Musadhique (2016) comments that “regarding the gender question, these films are silent. It seems that the directors make films considering the general aspects of the community. They are not presenting any revolutionary ideas but are rather cementing the already circulated gender notions” (p.138). The Left-behind wives are portrayed in the movies as promiscuous beings who elope or engage in extramarital affairs (Aneesa from the movie *Pathiyathrakkoru Ticket*). These negative portrayals create a kind of public consciousness which then gets rigidified in the social psyche. Also, the negative depiction reinforces a kind of dominant knowledge against them in society. Home cinemas frequently focus on the immoral/unethical lifestyle of the Left-behind wives. However, home movies have never favoured the portrayal of any sexual actions, but they did impose sexual objectification by portraying women as passive or obedient sexual objects.

Men were shown in the movies as being extremely active, aggressive, assertive, and kindhearted. Moreover, actors that play migrant workers appear in films the most frequently (Abbas and Manu are two hardworking migrants from the movie *Pathiyathrakkoru Ticket*, Zubair from *Parethan thirich varunnu*, and Bapputty from *Aliyanoru free visa*). They tried to adhere to conventional stereotypes of women as weak, docile, and incompetent. In-home movies, female

characters are mostly concerned with taking care of people and their homes. The majority of ideal/good women in home movies are devoted, respectful, subordinate to men, committed to their families, and concerned with the welfare of others. In the movie, they portrayed a few women who are fervently devout and lead lives devoted to Allah. (Safiya, a character featured in the film *Parethan thirich varunnu*, Manu's wife from *Pathiyathrakkoru Ticket*). In addition, it features a harsh mother-in-law who gets furious over her daughters-in-law and displays how henpecked their husbands were (In the movie '*Aliyan oru free visa*', Mumtaz is the obedient, submissive and devoted daughter-in-law, and Ummayya is a greedy and angry mother-in-law). The majority of portrayals and (re)presentations in home films contribute to the perpetuation of gendered culture in northern Kerala. The adoption of Butler's theory of performativity for comprehending the potential and constraints of women's gender performances in Home movies may be positioned in this section. Performativity, in particular, provides a convenient lens for analysing women's experiences in settings where gender expectations can considerably (re)shape the lived experiences (Butler, 1990/1999).

I have received a variety of responses while examining the views of the key respondents on the representation of the Left-behind wives in Home movies. Mrs Ummukulsu, who is forty-seven years old, has two children, residing with her in-laws, said that:

I have seen a lot of home videos, such as Parethan Thirich Varunnu, Aliyanoru Free Visa, Nashtapariharam and others. Every film is a blend of humour and sentiments and is done quite well. Before the arrival of Pendrive and all, my husband, brothers and brothers-in-law used to bring the CDs of home cinemas from the Gulf while coming home. We used to watch these home movies during our leisure time. Certain scenes and actors in the movies incited humour, and we used to joke about the same. An actor named 'kunjakka' (in the movie) was our hero.

The anecdote mentioned above contains the first mention of the Home movie, and when the researcher inquired about the portrayal of Left-behind wives in the Home movie; Ummukulsu responded as follows:

Some wives are not concerned about their husbands' plights and cheat on them. They prefer leading a luxurious life here and might also engage in extramarital affairs.

Home cinemas portray these types of women. Even I am aware of numerous instances in my nearby areas where a stranger visit one of our neighbours, who is a Gulf wife. Someone has claimed to see a man regularly leaving her house around midnight; similar incidents occur in our society and are comically depicted in films.

The response from eight other respondents goes in tandem with the views expressed by Ummukulsu when it came to the case of Gulf wives. Another key respondent Mrs. Rumana, who is thirty-three years old, completed 12th class schooling, and is a mother of three children, states:

Having a husband who works in the Gulf comes up as a privilege for some women, and they end up doing whatever they please with their husbands' earnings. These women create a negative identity which eventually affects others, especially those who are devoted.

Another key respondent Mrs Hamda, who is forty years old, a graduate and the mother of a boy and a girl, shares:

Those Home cinemas appeal to me. The kids frequently act out the characters in the movie in their games. However, the sex jokes portrayed in the films bother me. If my phone is engaged when my husband calls me from abroad, he has a tendency to refer to those films and accuse me of loose and immoral behaviour. These films trigger suspicion in the minds of the people, especially husbands.

Mrs Fathima, another key informant who is forty-one years old, a post-graduate, a mother of two, and who resides in a separate home close to her husband's hometown, shares:

Personally, I am not a great fan of Home cinemas, for they portray women in a negative light. The Gulf wives are shown as adulterous in nature. They lack any agency. All these ends up strengthening their bad reputation. Also, the films are mainly concerned with the shady grounds (dowry, extramarital relations of gulf wives and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law fights).

The anecdotes shed light on the wide range of opinions regarding how Left-behind wives are portrayed in Home movies. An application of Butler's theory focusing on cinematic portrayals allows for the examination of performativity among Gulf wives and the institutional rules and

norms that shape their behaviours and interactions. It notably considers the difficulties faced by the Left-behind wives in society and how their depiction may be glaringly evident to the majority of the Left-behind wives. The popularisation of home cinema significantly contributed to the development of Kerala's media culture's imaginary framework and, more broadly, to the reinforcement of gendered culture. In one sense, home movies made an effort to adhere to the social norms that were expected of each gender. However, the representation also helped to legitimise/normalise gendered culture. Further, individuals who wish to defy performativity must deal with several complexities in this male-dominated society. In the process of bolstering gender performances, the media also play an inevitable part. In particular, sexual objectification is fueled by the media. Objectification always involves creating binary categories and gendered categories. The majority of objectification and preconceptions in the media's portrayals of people are caused by the process of conforming to the cultural stereotypes of society and vice versa.

According to Jenkins and Finneman (2018), when considering women's experiences in patriarchal societies, a Butlerian approach to examining gender and how it expresses both individually and collectively is very instructive. I argue that Butler's theory pertains to the representation of gulf wives in home cinema and has aided in analysing gender performances in these films. However, Left-behind wives are not a homogeneous group. Different sects, ages, locations, educational levels, classes, and other socio-cultural backgrounds are represented within this group. For instance, some women may be educated and from affluent families, while others may be from lower socio-economic backgrounds or from rural areas. Thus, it adds complexity to Butler's theory by considering women's diverse interwoven identities based on their class, sect, locality, education, and others.

A group of respondents unanimously complimented the home video's portrayal of Gulf wives. Another set of responses dislikes the portrayal of Gulf wives in those films and frequently criticises the representation of Gulf wives as objects of subjection and subordination in the film. Being a Gulf wife has led to bad experiences and treatment for some women. Therefore, most of their responses are a reflection of their life observations and lived experiences.

In addition to the Home video, the public images, reports, and news of Gulf wives generate a negative perception of them and play a vital role in shaping a bad public opinion against them.

Hence, let us look at how the Left-behind wives are depicted in newspaper stories and Digital Media.

2.3.2.1 Gulf Wives in Newspaper Stories and Digital Media

Due to the huge outflow of men from the northern regions of Kerala to the Gulf countries, most women are Left-behind at home in their native places. The absence of men always produces a negative perception of the Left-behind wives among the local people. Thus, Gulf wives are indeed a ‘hot’ topic and controversial subject in public discussions in northern Kerala. Newspaper articles and digital media play an important part in this. The media has a significant influence on public opinion and sentiment, both positive and negative aspects. The increased media coverage in contemporary society has also influenced people’s perspectives on various problems (Mutz & Soss, 1997). Several studies have found that newspaper reports and media coverage have an impact on social opinion formation (Haller & Norpoth, 1997; Hetherington, 1996; Hill, Lo, Vavreck & Zaller, 2013; Hopkins, Kim, & Kim, 2017; Soroka, Stecula, & Wlezien, 2015). Newspaper reports and digital media appear to have a significant impact on public impressions and attitudes.

I have noticed headlines with terms such as ‘*gulfukarante Bharya*’ or ‘*pravasiyude bharya*’ to attract a large audience. Additionally, if the individuals (Gulf wives) in the news are familiar faces, the news disseminates like wildfire. It occurs because of the cultural heritage of the Malabar region, which places emphasis on social connection, neighbourhood relevance, community involvement, and informal social control. Communities are subject to both direct and indirect social control; there are unwritten regulations encouraging neighbourly cooperation and coexistence. People are compelled to alter their behaviour to fit into the norms out of fear of being rejected, humiliated, gossiped about, and socially isolated by their neighbours. The informal network of relationships is assigned more prominence in rural areas and other informal groups (Brickell, & Datta, 2011; Rockenbauch, & Sakdapolrak, 2017; Wilson, 1978). However, it must be acknowledged that the aforesaid Malabar features are usually associated with the rural population and do not venture into urban lives. These features, however, prevail in substantial part, if not completely. Because of the effects of societal change processes such as industrialization and urbanization, these features have lost some of their integrity over time in Malabar.

The majority of reports and news concerning them shape the public's perception of Left-behind wives. As a result, the Left-behind wives' mobility and interactions with others are publicly denounced and suspected in society. Similarly, these perceptions build unfavourable labels for wives in society through rumours, emotional attacks and accusations. The Malayalam movie *Neeyum Njanum*³⁴, which can be translated into 'You and Me,' examines the moral policing problems the actress encounters as a Left-behind wife. The portrayal helps to comprehend the struggles of these wives due to husbands' migration, particularly the claims of immoral behaviours and allegations. It is to be noted that the depiction of the Gulf wives in mainstream Malayalam movies was a rare phenomenon prior to the 2000s. And *Neeyum Njanum* has made an attempt to trace the lifeworld of a Left-behind wife. Another film that is worth mentioning is titled, *Pathemaari*³⁵, translated as 'dhow'. But this film, directed by Salim Ahmad³⁶ in the year 2015, attempts to capture the hardships of the protagonist Pallikkal Narayanan, who went to the gulf to make a living for himself and his family, which ends up giving a male bias to the movie. Some major points to be inferred after analysing the mainstream Malayalam movies bring on many facts to the dais, where most of the movies fail to represent the lives of the Malabar Muslims. The movie industry lacks a critical eye in conceptualizing the standpoints of the Malabar muslims in general and the left-behind wives in particular. Movies like *Khaddama*³⁷ and *Ayisha*³⁸ can be referred to

³⁴ A. K. Sajan wrote and directed the movie 'Neeyum Njanum' in 2019, which translates to "You and me." Sharafudheen, Anu Sithara, and Siju Wilson are the protagonists. On January 18, 2019, Kokers Films launched *Neeyum Njanum* in Kerala. A newlywed couple relocates to a tiny town in an effort to begin a new life. However, the chances are against them, and they experience a roller coaster of life. To be fair, the movie has some charming moments, and certain important topics, like moral policing, are addressed. A story of our period, *Neeyum Njanum* touches on moral policing, theology, and politics. Without overusing the Malabar cliché, it keeps us involved in the story.

³⁵ The 2015 Indian Malayalam period drama film *Pathemari* (transl. Dhow), was written and directed by Salim Ahamed and features Mammooty in the lead role. The story revolves around Pallikkal Narayanan (Mammooty), a man who moved to the Middle East in the early 1960s when the Kerala Gulf boom began.

³⁶ Salim Ahamed is an Indian film director, screen writer and producer. His 2011 film *Adaminte Makan Abu*, won multiple awards and was screened at numerous international film festivals, marked his directorial debut. Additionally, it was selected as India's official submission for the 84th Academy Awards' Best Foreign Film category. Then he directed two films with Mammooty as the lead, *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013) and *Pathemari* (2015).

³⁷ Kamal co-wrote and directed the 2011 Indian survival drama movie *Khaddama*, which translates to "Housemaid". Kavya Madhavan plays the lead character in it. Through the experiences of a housemaid in Saudi Arabia, the movie tells the tale of some immigrants in the Persian Gulf region. The movie was dubbed in to Tamil as "*Palaivana Roja*".

³⁸ *Ayisha* is a 2023 Indian multilingual biographical movie based on the life of Malayalam actress Nilambur Ayisha, an Indian actress, produced by Zakariya Mohammed and directed by Aamir Pallikkal. Manju Warriar and Mona Tawil plays the leading roles in the film, and Radhika and Krishna Sankar play significant supporting roles.

in terms of analysing the lives of domestic migrant workers in transnational spaces. A shift in terms of representation post-2000 can be seen as the beginning of a possible change.

Therefore, examining how these women deal with or negotiate their experiences amidst society's contempt and criticism is crucial. Those aspects will be examined in the fourth chapter from the perspective of emotion. Also, in a specific cultural setting, culture limits how emotions are perceived and expressed. How people's reactions to diverse events and expressions of emotions are determined by the culture are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

2.4. 'Making' of the Left-behind Wives: An Analysis

While looking at the gendered culture in the case of the Left-behind wives, it is apparent that they imprison themselves in their ways of 'doing gender' in the socio-cultural environment. It is significant to note here that most of the Left-behind wives face psychological pressures and trauma in the absence of their husbands in their private life. The field data show that 88% of the respondents have experienced depression and anxiety during the initial days of their husband's departure to the Gulf. Besides, societal attitudes and expectations toward the Left-behind wives end up burdening them, thereby triggering mental illness. It may result in some form of dysfunctionality in meeting the obligations prescribed for family and marriage. Therefore, I cannot neglect the aspects of societal attitude towards the Left-behind wives and their confrontation against it. My conversation with the respondents gave a complete picture of their social environment and the behavioural pattern of the larger society towards them. The public gaze and stigma associated with Left-behind wives make them vulnerable. The study gives insights into the psyche of the respondents in society. One of the key respondents, Mrs Jaseena, who is thirty-four years old, a mom of two children, who have completed secondary education and is staying in a newly built home in Malappuram, shares:

I am very conscious of what people think about me, especially in the absence of my husband. Neighbours are eagerly waiting to hear some loose talks about 'gulfukarante Bharya', mostly because a Gulf migrant's wife has an undesirable position in society. People generally think that we are vulnerable, prone to sexual urges and more interested in sexual talks. Our chastity is a commoner's paradise to be commented on.

If neighbours notice me talking to someone like fish sellers, vegetable vendors and others, they would suspiciously gaze at me and accuse me of indulging in loose talks.

The study observed that Left-behind wives have a low position in society. She is expected to be conscious of whom she interacts with, from whom she purchases groceries, vegetables, and other items, and, more importantly, with whom she socializes. Through the interaction with my respondents, I understood their anxieties and stresses regarding societal attitude and social acceptability; the Left-behind wives have had negative experiences with their neighbours, relatives, and acquaintances. The table below (2.9) showcases the negative experiences that Left-behind wives have had with their friends and neighbours, and it has been classified into six categories. In this typology, the author used the term ‘extra gaze’ to characterize an unfavourable look directed at women as ‘Left-behind wives’ in society, and a number of women reported receiving extra stares and the impression that their movements were being observed by neighbours and other acquaintances. Another term used was ‘stereotypical behaviour,’ which implies the widespread negative perception of Left-behind wives in Kerala society’s public discourse. It can involve activities like unwelcoming attitudes from others, intimidation, and being treated as second-class citizens in society. The next term in this typology, ‘derogatory approach,’ refers to a contemptuous attitude from neighbours and acquaintances, as well as numerous accounts of stones being thrown, windows being knocked in the absence of men, and experiences of unpleasant disturbances in their homes during the night. It is mostly true for people that live in nuclear families without an adult male.

Table 2.9- Negative experiences faced by the Left-behind wives from their friends and Neighbourhood.

Negative experiences faced by the Left-behind wives	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Derogatory approach from neighbours	6	5
No bad experiences	17	14
Not yet noticed	3	2
Extra gaze	50	40
Stereotypical behaviour	45	36
Inappropriate calls and messages	3	2
Grand Total	124	100

The above table clearly shows that in the absence of their husbands, the majority of respondents (83%) have had negative encounters with their friends and neighbours. Extra gaze (40%), stereotyped behaviour (36%), derogatory approach (5%), and inappropriate calls from known people (2%) are the four categories of bad experiences faced by respondents. Only 14% of the 124 respondents have reported not facing any unpleasant experiences, and 2% have not yet seen any negative experiences among their friends or neighbours. A look into the socio-cultural backgrounds of the 14 per cent of respondents points out that the majority of them come from upper-class urban backgrounds. The Left-behind wives in the middle class were always relegated to the bottom rung of the social hierarchy. Here, I want to draw attention to the oppressions and exploitations that the respondents experience in society, highlighting the intersectional nature of the same brought on by gender, religion, and class in the social system.

The majority of the respondents shared that they face unscrupulous experiences from familiar people and close relatives. They have received numerous inappropriate calls or text messages and incongruous videos and pictures with sexual content. In response to the assault, the majority of interviewees said that they blocked numbers or used call-blocking applications. Some respondents revealed the phone numbers of their stalkers to their husbands or other primary kin in order to threaten them and avert future complications. One of the respondents, Mrs Haseeba, who is thirty-one years old, a graduate and the mother of a baby girl, shares:

I had received sexually explicit messages and calls from my neighbour. I informed my brother, and he dealt with it secretly. I did not approach the police. I know if I approached the police, it would become public, and I am petrified thinking of the consequences if this news goes public. The people here are very judgemental and would look at me with suspicion. They will accuse me of luring men and will mock me. They will not believe I am not the one who did it. I kept quiet, as I was afraid of the public gaze and judgements.

The majority of the respondents reported similar incidents, and in order to prevent future trouble, they simply blocked the stalkers' phone numbers. Only one of the 124 respondents, Mrs Haleema, who is 38 years old, has completed her tenth grade, is a mother of three children, and lives in a separate residence, revealed that she had reported their neighbour's unwanted advances to the police. She shares:

I used to live in a single storied house a long time ago. One of my neighbours, a young man, used to climb up to the parapet and throw papers with lewd messages and vulgar pictures written on them through the ventilator holes. This used to happen around midnight. Fed up with his activities, I went to the police with the help of my brother-in-law. He was arrested but was let off after a few days. It was a really hard time for me. Despite the police case, he used to give me dirty looks.

Another Key respondent, Mrs Hawwa, who is forty years old, completed 9th class and lives in a separate home in her husband's hometown with her three kids, shares:

I do Sunnah prayer³⁹ at night During the month of Ramzan. There was a time when we did not have a bathroom inside the house, which required me to step outside to wash my hands. One night, I saw a guy standing near the window of the house next door. He started using vulgar language and asked me to let him into the house. He had knocked on my window once before, but I never took him too seriously. I lived in that house with

³⁹ A Sunnah prayer (Arabic: صلاة السنة is an optional or supererogatory salah (ritual prayer) that can be performed in (addition to the five daily salah, which are compulsory for all Muslims. Some Sunnah prayers are performed at the same time as the five daily mandatory prayers, while others are performed only at specific times (e.g., late at night) or on particular days. Some have their own name (e.g., Tahajjud), while others are identified by how they are performed (e.g., "4 (rakat) before Zuhr and two after"). Sunnah prayer might last from a few minutes to several hours.

my kids. Later, I informed my husband and father-in-law regarding this. Initially, they all blamed me for his action, saying that I might have provoked him by being rude to him at some point. But later, my father-in-law went to the guy's father and resolved the matter. It never escalated to become a police case. This incident shook me so much that I was scared to stay in my own home. I felt safe when one of my relatives started living with me.

The majority of respondents lack the mental resolve to contact police officers and other public officials. It is mostly due to the nature of the harassment and their fear of the societal gaze and allegations made against women in such situations. Society humiliated them and charged them with having illicit connections. Many of them face allegations regarding immoral relationships and extramarital affairs. The following table (2.10) demonstrates the kinds of allegations these women face in their everyday life as Left-behind wives.

Table 2.10-Allegations faced by the Left-behind wives in their everyday life as Left-behind wives

Allegations of Extra-marital relationships faced by the Left-behind wives	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No allegations	46	37
Suspicious relations with neighbours	13	10
Allegation with sister's in-law husband	1	1
Respondents faced allegations but were no more interested in disclosing the things in detail	50	40
With husband's friends, who frequently come to help	6	5
With co-workers	1	1
With the informant's relatives	5	4
With the informant's friends	1	1
With vegetable vendor	1	1
Grand Total	124	100

The above table indicates the allegations faced by the Left-behind wives, and most of the Left-behind wives were accused of being in extramarital affairs in the absence of their husbands.

In this study, I note that the majority of the respondents (40%) confronted allegations of Left-behind wives in their lives, and they are not interested in revealing the accusations and allegations in detail. They silently said ‘yes’ to me, and some of them showed no interest in revealing further details regarding the allegations. 10 % of the respondents faced accusations of extra-marital relationships with their neighbours, and 5% of them have faced accusations of extra-marital relations with their husband’s friends, who frequently come to help them. 4% of them were accused of extra-marital relations with their relatives. The notable thing about this circumstance is that 37% of the respondents were spared from these unwarranted accusations. They are always troubled and challenged by these baseless allegations made against the Left-behind women, and I pay particular attention to the statements related to their choice of attire. Dressing style instigates a subject of public gaze (Devika, 2007), and this is why migrant husbands force their wives to wear purdah and other similar kinds of dresses while going out, especially in their absence. Sixty –nine per cent of the respondents said that they had not encountered any kind of public gaze due to their clothing while going out with their husbands. They discussed the emotional security they had when they were with their partners. One of the key respondents, Mrs Sameera, a graduate who is 34 years old and resides with her in-laws, compared her experiences travelling with her partner to those she had while she travelled alone.:

I feel more at ease while travelling with my husband. I have been subjected to many bad experiences, and travelling alone feels like a nightmare. I can distinctly remember the case of a taxi driver who started having erotic dialogues with me. He even had the audacity to invite me to roam around with him. I was too frozen to even respond. I was alone and defenceless at that time. But it is different when we travel with our husbands. I feel safe and cocooned. There are no bad experiences. No stares and gaze at all.

Another key respondent, Mrs Haniya, who is 32 years old, a postgraduate, and lives with her in-laws, also recounted similar experiences. She used to commute by train to visit her mother because her brother works in Thiruvananthapuram, and her mother stays with her brother’s family; she says:

When I travel alone, I prefer not to sleep on the train. Every sound makes me uneasy. Generally speaking, I like to travel with someone, preferably my husband.

The aforementioned excerpts demonstrate how comfortable married women are when their male partners are there. They also indicate how having their husbands around increases their social standing. The case is reversed in the absence of their husbands; the Left-behind wives are treated similarly to single women and are constantly monitored by the society. In society, the left-behind wives are also viewed as a sexually vulnerable group, and they are subjected to a variety of dangers.

Table 2.11- Respondent's Feelings on the Image of the Left-behind Wives in Neighbourhood Perceptions

Respondent's Feelings about the Image of them in Neighbourhood Perceptions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Both insecurity and security	2	2
Insecurity	25	20
Mental insecurity	70	56
Nil	18	15
Security	9	7
Grand Total	124	100

The above table (Table 2.11) explores the information that the majority of the respondents (56%) provided regarding mental insecurity. They face mental insecurity due to the existing neighbourhood perceptions regarding the image of the Left-behind wives in the contemporary patriarchal society. Mental insecurity challenges them in all ways, and the feeling of insecurity creates depression and emotional stress among them. Twenty per cent of the respondents reported feeling unsafe in all spaces, and they belong to middle-class households from nuclear families. Fifteen per cent of the respondents do not have any issues, and seven per cent of them feel secure. The fact that these two groupings are members of extended and joint families is an important consideration when evaluating them. Here, I note that the majority of the respondents who report having a sense of mental unease are members of the nuclear family in modern society. Allegations and undesirable claims against the Left-behind wives put their husbands in a dilemma, leading to marital conflict. As a result, the husbands continue to call and inquire about them, which eventually causes the wives further inconvenience (See chapter 4). The majority of husbands view their wives

as their property and are worried about the stereotypes against the Left-behind wives that are prevalent in society. Some of them forbid their spouses from seeking employment or pursuing higher education. They attempt to adapt their wives into the “culturally specific” group and elevate them to the status of the “ideal woman” in society.

Another informant shared the experiences of her husband’s concern about the image of working women. She had worked as a pharmacist in the nearby hospital, and after their marriage, she was forced to resign from the job.

My husband was not in favour of me going out for work post our marriage, as it will bring me in contact with other men. The wives of migrant men are scrutinised in society due to the dominant perception that they have a loose character. Also, working women are considered as having low status. My husband is very much conditioned to this kind of attitude towards working women, which explains his strict restrictions on me. He believes that in order to avoid these loose talks, it is better to stop working so that I may keep away from contact with ‘undesirable’ men.

Many people continue to feel that women who work outside the home have a low position in society; yet, the majority of men desire highly educated women (as spouses) to teach their children in the future and not to exercise their choices regarding career options. I learned that some of the respondents were rank holders and top scorers in secondary and higher secondary exams through my interactions with them. It was Saradmoni (1994) who put forward an important question regarding women realizing their potential: “Where have all the young women who have proven their abilities disappeared?” this question is really important. The majority of the respondents were exceptionally talented and actively engaged in both academic and extracurricular activities throughout their time in high school and college. Most of them stopped engaging in all these activities after being married, but it is clear that they are still constrained by gender- and domesticity-specific grammar. Consider these stories from one of the respondents, Lubna, who is 32 years old, completed her VHSE, and has been residing with her kids in a recently constructed house close to her husband's brother's residence:

During my school days, I was very active in sports and got district-level prizes for the long jump and 100-meter race. I was good at my studies and wished to become a sports teacher. The scenario changed after my marriage. I dropped out from my

studies and decided to focus completely n my family. I wanted to be with my children. I really enjoy what I am doing now. I wanted to be a complete family woman. I didn't feel any remorse for stopping my studies mid-way. As a woman, I strongly believe that it is my responsibility to take care of my family.

The personal narratives of respondents reveal the fact regarding how women are imprisoned and constrained by the structured grammar of gender and domesticity. Recently, one could notice a change in the meanings of domesticity in contemporary Kerala society. The meanings, structure and ideology of domesticity have been changing depending on the women's employment status and the type of family they belong to (Sheekumar, 2009). Most people want to include themselves in their society's 'socially sanctioned domesticity' and 'ideal happy matrimony' (Sheekumar, 2009). Media has also played a key role in making the 'ideal happy matrimony', 'socially sanctioned domesticity' and 'ideal women' in the patriarchal society. As I already discussed, the role of media in every society, media has a role in the process of 'image making' based on gender, caste, class, education, occupation and other categorical features of the society. Moreover, in the case of the Left-behind wives, they are subjected to rigorously strict chastity, and this chastity does not apply to men. Customs and cultural images overdo the chastity of women in their entire life.

Summary

Cultural factors have played an inseparable part in the genesis of every society, and they are crucial for understanding the genealogy of every phenomenon. Social institutions such as family, marriage, and religion exercise an important role in the transmission of cultural elements. Cultural variances may be influenced by social institutions as carriers of cultural components, depending on the community and vice versa. In addition to this, cultural variations are also influenced by historical, perceptive, behavioural, and emotional aspects.

The gender dynamics in Malabar is strongly impacted by cultural factors, resulting in the production of a gendered culture. Culture plays an important role in the construction of 'woman' and 'men' in the social structure through the socialization process. Media and literature contribute to the socialization process and act as secondary socialization agents. Media and literature play an important role in the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of any phenomenon in contemporary society. I have tried to discuss the impact of 'Home cinema' on the people of

northern Kerala in this chapter, particularly the depiction of wives of gulf migrants. The concept of 'Home Cinema' played a significant part in defining the aesthetic framework of Kerala's media culture in particular and in preserving the gendered culture in general. The gender dynamics, performances, perceptions and experiences in Kerala's public sphere, even today, are impacted by the indecent portrayal of the gulf wives in these cinemas as 'sexually vulnerable' beings lacking subjectivity and autonomy. Most movies represented Gulf wives in a negative light, thereby damaging their social image. Furthermore, the home movies showcased the cultural features of Malabar as well as the intricacies of their everyday lives.

The chapter demonstrated how cultural influences in northern Kerala 'enable and restrain' the wives of Gulf migrants. It also shows the role of family and marriage in the patriarchal society's formation of 'women' and 'men,' as well as the Left-behind wives' 'infringed' experiences of themselves and patriarchal prescriptions in the Malabar context. Within the said context, it is necessary to locate the emotions and expressions of the same as experienced and practised by Left-behind wives. The next chapter in this thesis focuses on these factors through the lens of the sociology of emotions.

Chapter III

Emotions and Experiences: The Social Landscape of the Left-behind Wives

In this chapter, the sociology of emotion is used to theorise the experiences of the Left-behind women. It begins by locating the history and development of an emerging academic branch called the sociology of emotion. The chapter documents the Left-behind wives' stories in an effort to gather various perspectives on their emotional experiences and makes an attempt to explain emotions as socio-cultural artefacts. It examines how gender and gender-based socialisation impact emotions and other behavioural dynamics during interactions and experiences. The researcher, therefore, makes use of primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with significant respondents and participant observation. This chapter also analyses the *Kathupattu*⁴⁰, by specifically taking note of the feminine emotions and expressions. In order to understand the chapter, I used a variety of secondary readings. The chapter is divided into six parts, each of which is further divided into two or three subheadings.

3.1 Sociology of Emotion

The sociology of emotion developed as a sub-field in sociology during the latter half of 1970, and the term was coined by Arlie Hochschild in 1975.⁴¹ This younger branch of sociology aims to develop a number of theoretical approaches to study and understand emotions and to integrate the emotions and emotional aspects of human beings into the general sociological realm. The sociology of emotion helps us understand the following, first of all, it helps us to understand what an emotion is, the range of feelings we experience as social beings, and how intricate and complex

⁴⁰ *Kathupattukal* is a type of letter writing in which letters are written in the form of songs. *Kathupattu* became popular in Mappila households just as love songs became popular. It is also one of the most common genres of *Mappilappaattu*, which were initially 'message songs' sent by relatives and friends to sing at special occasions such as weddings and other gatherings. Pulikkottil Hyder (1879-1975) wrote *Mariyakuttiyudekathu* (Mariyakutti's letter), which is a famous *Kathupaattu* about the separation of husband and wife. After *Mariyakuttiyude Kathu*, SA Jameel's *Kathupaattu* 'Dubai *Kathupaattu*' became well-known (Musadhique, 2016). SA Jameel's Dubai *Kathupaattu* is very common in *Kathupattu*. Moyin Kutty Vaidyar, Nallalam Beeran, and PT Beeran Kutty Moulavi were among the other writers who contributed to *Kathupattukal*. (See more, Kutty, V. M., (2010), *Mappilappattinte Charithra Sanchrangal*, Lipi Publication, Kozhikode, (pp.81- 83) and Rashique, Mohammed, K. V. (2019), *Migrant Literature and Kerala Muslims* (Unpublished degree dissertation). Darul Huda Islamic University, Chemmad, (pp.34-39).

⁴¹ Thomas J Scheff and Theodore D Kemper are the other two pioneers of this branch of sociology (Bericat, 2016)

each of our individual emotional processes is. The sociology of emotion also aids in our understanding of the social aspect of our everyday emotions (i.e., the social embeddedness of human emotions) and the emotional underpinnings of everyday social phenomena (the emotional foundation of social phenomena). The sociology of emotion has carried out a sociological analysis of many specific emotions (fear, trust, shame, etc.) and emotional analyses in numerous areas of sociology (gender, work, organisations, social movements, etc.) (Bericat, 2016). It is in this regard that the sociological analysis of the emotional and experiential landscape of the Left-behind wives, which I am going to present in the following section, becomes significant in the current research.

The concept of emotion occupies a central place in general sociological theory (Kemper, 1990; Collins, 1990). Emotion primarily acts as a driving force for social interaction, social phenomenon and social organization (Bericat, 2016; Kemper, 1990; Stets & Turner, 2014). Emotion is viewed as a resource that is structured by changing circumstances as well as the structuring of its context (Lutz & White, 1986), and it is also perceived as a complex, ongoing process that is shaped by experiences, relationships, and culture. Heise (2007), Rogers and Robinson (2014), and Scholl (2013) have divided emotional states into various dimensions based on their valence (positive/negative), potency (strong/weak), and arousal (active/passive) (Bericat, 2016). In this chapter, these dimensions have been explored.

According to Kemper (1978), there are two reasons why sociologists did not focus much on emotion in the early decades: the first is because psychological research on emotion is already available, and the second is that sociologists are required to be familiar with social interaction history in order to examine emotions. He points out that, in the past, not many sociological theories have considered the study of human emotion to be a pertinent area of sociology.:

Throughout the history of sociological theory, emotions have been the subject of some concern. For example, Marx (1964b) discussed the mortification (p.125) of alienated labor, Durkheim (1915) the religious sentiment, suicide and despair, Weber (1947) the passion of charismatic attachments and “disenchantment of the world” by the ethos of rationalization (Weber, 1946, p.155), Simmel (1950) the subtle currents of affect that pass between the sexes and Homans (1961) the feelings of guilt or anger that ensue from overly favorable or unfavorable outcomes of the rule of “distributive justice” (pp.75-76). Obviously, sociologists have dealt with emotions. Nevertheless, a comprehensive theory of emotions from a sociological perspective has yet to be offered. (p.1)

Some sociologists adopted Mead's theories to examine human emotions in the latter decades of the 20th century, identifying emotions as the driving force behind behaviour. The sociology of emotion is a relatively recent topic that emerged primarily as a result of the sociological analysis of moods, affects, and other emotional states. Thus, sociologists began to incorporate the study of affective structures, emotional dynamics, and emotional cultures into their areas of interest (Bericat, 2016). In *Human Nature and the social order*, Cooley (1964) takes a social constructionist stance on emotion while evaluating some sociological theories. Despite researching human behaviour, Goffman (1959) did not develop the idea of emotion. Many of his concepts involving emotion management were later applied by other scholars. In his work, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (1967/2005), Goffman also proposes a number of structural theories based on emotion.

There exists a number of theoretical approaches to emotion, emotional experience, emotional dynamics and emotional expressions. Turner and Stets (2006) categorize the theoretical approaches to emotion into five theoretical categories; Cultural theories, Structural theories, Symbolic Interactionist theories, Ritual theories, and Exchange theories of emotion. The cultural theory holds that every society has its own feeling rules⁴² and display rules⁴³ and that “culture defines what, when, and how we should feel” (Bericat, 2016, p.497). In their research, a number of sociologists and psychologists have shown that emotions are culture-specific and socially produced (Hochschild, 1975; Lazarus, 1984; McCarthy, 1994; Prinz, 2004). Our emotions are shaped by our society's culture through the process of socialization. Due to the fact that every community has its own emotional culture and vocabulary, cultural sentiments have an impact on the variations in emotional expression. The overarching foundational theme of this chapter is the cultural theory of emotion.

⁴² Feeling rules are socially accepted conventions that shape how individuals attempt to experience their emotions in specific social contexts. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild first proposed this idea in 1979. A more in-depth discussion of feeling norms is found in Hochschild's 1983 book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, particularly in relation to the occupations of flight attendants and bill collectors.

⁴³ Display rules are unspoken rules on how to display oneself within a social group or culture. They might be seen as culturally imposed laws that individuals pick up early in life through encounters and socialisation with others. They pick up on these cultural norms at an early age, which dictates where, how, and when to display particular emotions.

Kemper (1978) proposes the structural theory of emotion. He focuses on the relational characteristics in the course of social interaction and argues that power and status are two key dimensions for comprehending social relationships in any social setting. For him, the two basic social dimensions, power and status, plays a crucial role in activating primary emotions, including both positive and negative emotions (Kemper, 1978; Bericat, 2016). In this chapter, I have examined these elements in the experiences of the key respondents. Australian sociologist Barbalet (1998) also views emotions in the context of social structure in *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: A Macro Sociological Approach*. He elucidates the importance of emotions in sociological theories and considers emotions as central to social processes and social structure (Barbalet, 1998). Barbalet (1998) and Thamm (2004) argue that emotion is basically a social cause and are the effect of social relationships, institutions and social processes. Thamm (2004) examines emotional expression, which depends on varying social structures and incorporates Kemper's power-status dimensions in his analysis. Expectations and sanctions are considered two universal substructures for creating emotional categories among people. He argues that there is a direct link between the structural dimensions and emotional categories and introduces a theoretical framework using power-status dimensions to foresee the emotional categories.⁴⁴

These numerous theoretical perspectives on emotion assert that, in varying degrees of intensity, our emotions, emotional experience, emotional dynamics, and emotional expressions are connected to and influenced by external social circumstances.

⁴⁴ The third approach, Symbolic Interactionist theory, according to Bericat (2016), means that individuals always strive to confirm both their images of themselves (self-concept) and the specific identities through which they act in every given social interaction (role identity). The fourth theoretical approach to emotion is the exchange theory of Emotion, proposed by George C. Homans and Peter M. Blau. According to it, every interaction and behavior is the result of an exchange process. People receive positive reinforcements when they perform desired actions and receive negative reinforcements when they exhibit undesired behaviour (Stets & Turner, 2006). Lawler (2001) in his "Affect theory of social exchange" identifies how and when emotions beget social exchange and how the process of social exchange produces positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions contain excitement, pleasure and pride, and negative emotions are sadness, shame, and anger. The fifth approach is the ritual theory which focuses on how the rituals produce emotions in social life. This theory suggests that rituals are the centre of emotional and cultural life in social dynamics. Several notable sociologists, including Durkheim, Goffman, and Collins, studied the aspects of rituals in emotional and social life. In a nutshell, these are the five relevant theoretical approaches utilized in studying emotions. Among the five theories, even though my focus is mainly on the cultural and structural theories of emotion, all these theories, especially the exchange theory and symbolic interactionist theory, strengthen in some sense my specific arguments about how the emotions of the Left-behind wives are generated and expressed in certain specific ways.

3.1.1 Emotions as Socio-Cultural Artifacts

A range of sociological theories concerning emotion were discussed in the section on the sociology of emotion. It is now obvious that emotion is a critical aspect that determines how our continuous social interactions are structured and creates access and constraint channels. (Riis & Woodhead, 2010). That is to say, in different socio-cultural contexts, emotions are constructed in different ways. Many socio-cultural psychologists have noted the role of the socio-cultural environment in everyday emotions (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Davies & Spencer, 2010; Kemper, 1981; Lewis et al., 2010). Emotion is not just a bio-physiological product; rather, it is also the construction of the socio-cultural process. According to Michael Boiger and Batja Mesquita (2012), “emotions are best conceived as ongoing, dynamic and interactive processes that are socially constructed” (p. 21). Emotional meaning has a social relevance as opposed to a personal one. Additionally, depending on the society, the meaning varies. Emotion is treated as a central aspect of cultural meaning, with a corresponding interest in historical and cross-cultural variation in emotional meaning. The truth value of emotion becomes problematic, as emotion is seen as embedded in socially constructed categories. (Lutz & white, 1986, p.408). Kemper (1978) has found that “social situations influence the expression of emotions, not only in terms of intensity (e.g., the norms that distinguish permissiveness for emotional expression between men and women), but also directly by instigating the qualitatively different emotion themselves” (p.1). Riis and Woodhead (2010) argue that emotions are “generated in the interactions between self and society, self and symbol, and symbol and society” (p.7). In sum, society plays a crucial role in making, shaping and defining emotions in everyday interactions (Davies & Spencer, 2010; Kemper, 1981; C. Lutz & White, 1986). In other words, the construction of emotions and emotional patterns in each society differs in accordance with socio-cultural contexts (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012, 2015; Tiedens et al., 2004).

The relationship between social structures and the cultural meanings of emotions has been the subject of numerous research studies. The social structures and cultural patterns of each society have been used to generate explicit and implicit emotional reactions. Each individual internalises social norms and values, and their “expectations and rewards” in terms of the emotional categories are also influenced by their socialisation process (Thamm, 2004). The ‘sanctions and expectations’ reflect the cultural values of the particular society. The process of transference of emotions from

one society to another becomes worthless without understanding socio-cultural meaning attached to the particular emotions in society. Thus, the transferability of emotions holds much importance in cultural society, and its legitimacy (or authenticity) depends upon knowing (or understanding) both cultures⁴⁵.

According to Rydell, Mackie, Maitner, Claypool, Ryan, and Smith (2008), “membership in a group itself is sufficient to determine emotional experience” (pp.1141-42), and this argument stems from the Intergroup Emotion Theory⁴⁶ (IET). In the Intergroup Emotion Theory, people from the same community or group experience similar emotional reactions. More clearly, intergroup emotions are created by having a place with and getting a character from one gathering of people as opposed to another (Mackie, Smith & Ray, 2008). But when the community is proud, highly engaged individuals stand taller than those who are less identified. If the community is angry, individuals with a high level of identification report being angrier than those with a lower level of identification. This law does have one exception. When shared emotions have a negative impact on the community, such as shame over an intergroup infringement, highly engaged member individuals are less likely to share such emotions (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears & Manstead, 2006; Mackie, Smith & Ray, 2008). Mackie and Smith (2015); Tiedens, Sutton and Fong (2004) say that the inter-groups might be social categories like workspace, university, gender and political party. Intergroup emotions also vary depending on the nature of society and its culture; individuals from independent societies or cultures experience more withdrawal or feelings of separation than

⁴⁵ For example, let us consider the funeral ceremonies in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. If someone dies in Tamil Nadu, a fairly popular custom among some sections of the people is to dance. It is believed that these people dance and enjoy the experience because they believe that it will keep the souls of the deceased happy. However, these funeral practices differ from caste to caste, and even within a caste, they also differ from region to region. Keralites, on the other hand, do not follow the same custom. In short, people cannot understand the emotions associated with a different cultural society unless they understand the cultural context.

⁴⁶ Mackie and Smith (2015) coined the term *intergroup emotion* (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000) and developed *intergroup emotion theory* (IET; Mackie, Maitner, & Smith, 2009; Mackie, Silver, & Smith, 2004; Mackie & Smith, 2002; E. R. Smith & Mackie, 2006, 2008; E. R. Smith et al., 2007) to “systematically describe the uniquely group-level nature of the categorization, identification, and appraisal antecedents of intergroup emotions as well as their consequences for intergroup relations. The term intergroup emotion reflects the basic tenets of social identity and self-categorization theory: that group categorization is always socially comparative between and among groups, that the meaning of an in-group is always defined in reference to currently salient out-groups and vice versa, and that social categorization itself is inherently a group-level phenomenon” (p.264).

individuals from interdependent societies, in which advancing and keeping up connections is fundamental (Kitayama, Mesquita and Karasawa, 2006).

Sarah Ahmed (2014) explores “how emotions work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” (p.1). She develops a methodology called the “emotionality of texts” in her book titled *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Ahmed (2014) notes:

Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others. Indeed, attending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others. (p. 4)

Emotions can be interpreted and debated in many ways. According to symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1986; Collins, 2014; Goffman, 1967/2005; Scheff, 2005; Shott, 1979; Turner, 2007) and social constructionists (Frost & Averill, 1982; Kemper, 1981; McCarthy, 1989), emotion is “dependent on definitions of the situation, emotion vocabularies, and emotional beliefs, which vary across time and location”. Moreover, social anthropologists (Geertz, 1973; C. A. Lutz, 1988; C. Lutz & White, 1986; Lyon, 1995; Rosaldo, 1984) have analyzed that emotion can be observed through comprehensive cultural examination. The social anthropologist Lyon (1995) found that “emotions including feelings, sentiments, motivation, expression, representations are seen from this perspective to be the product of cultural construction through an individual’s socialization and his or her continuing experience in a particular socio-cultural context” (p. 245). Social psychological scholarships revealed that emotions are cultural artefacts and culturally specific (Boellstorff & Lindquist, 2004; Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Kövecses, 2003). They also note three aspects of emotions, including intensity, duration, and expressions, and these three aspects of emotions have two extreme sides: less intensive v/s more intensive, longer duration v/s lesser duration and overt v/s covert expressions. Women are considered emotional with more intense, longer duration and overt expressions, whereas men’s emotions are considered less intensive, of lesser duration and covertly expressed.

Emotionality has always been gendered, with certain emotions being classified as masculine and feminine in society. The stereotype of ‘emotional women’ and ‘rational men’ is an indirect consequence of the Cartesian mind-body dualism, as well as patriarchal notions constructed around emotion in society. Emotional stereotypes have been internalized through

gender roles, and gender roles come into being through socialization. The socialization of emotion is a composite and multi-layered process (Eisenberg et al., 1998); there are direct and indirect socializations of emotion; for instance, emotional socialization starts from family situations (Zahn-Waxler, 2010). Root & Denham (2010) conceptualize direct and indirect socialization as:

Direct socialization is thought to occur via parental reactions to emotions or parental discussion of emotions with their children. Typically, researchers have examined the different ways that parents respond to their children's emotions and how different types of reactions affect children's social and emotional development. Parents' responses to children's emotions are typically characterized as supportive or non-supportive. Indirect socialization is thought to occur from the emotional climate within the family unit (Halberstadt, Crisp, & Eaton, 1999) and via parents' own expressiveness of emotion during family interaction (Valiente, Fabes, Eisenberg, & Spinrad, 2004). The expression of emotion within the family unit affords children with the opportunity to witness others' emotional expressions and evaluate the responses others receive after the display of specific emotions. Thus, when children watch the other family members display fear or anger, they gather information about the level of appropriateness for specific emotions. Indeed, children appear to internalize the information they gather from their family's affective climate. (p. 3)

Many researchers have focused on the socialization of emotion, specifically parental socialization and children's emotional expression. Parental socialization of emotions has a central role in the development of emotions among children and can, directly and indirectly, impact the development of children's emotions. This also plays a crucial role in emotional expression in accordance with gender differences (Chaplin et al., 2005; Keller & Otto, 2009). Previous scholarship has noted three areas of emotional development such as understanding emotion, expression of emotion and regulation of emotion (Denham et al., 2003; Root & Denham, 2010; Saarni, 1985). Root and Denham (2010) note that:

Emotion understanding is thought to include both the comprehension of emotional experience and the understanding of others' emotional expressions (Denham et al., 2003; Eisenberg and others, 1998). The *expression of emotion* has been defined as the propensity to display emotions effectively and appropriately within given contexts and cultures (Denham et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1998). Finally, the *regulation of Emotion* has been defined as "the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994, p. 27). (p.2)

As I have elucidated the emotional development as a multifaceted process, I examine the emotional experiences of the Left-behind wives, including their expression of emotions, understanding of emotion and the regulation of emotion. Moreover, I note the role of gender in the construction of emotions in everyday interactions. There are scholarly works related to gender, emotion and the socialization of gender in emotional expressions (Brody, 1993, 1997; Fischer, 2000; Shields et al., 2006). Gender-based socialization has a considerable role to play in the construction of emotion and emotional experiences. As per Boellstorff and Lindquist (2004), a social-psychological analysis of gender and emotion found the expected effects of respondent sex on all three dimensions of emotion (intensity, duration, and expression), showing that women in all countries showed more extreme and longer-lasting emotions, as well as expressing their emotions more overtly. Society has normalized the fact that women ‘feel’ and are often termed as indecisive and unstable for this reason and hence incapable of holding power positions. At the same time, for men, expressions of anger and aggression have been highly normalized. In general, societal culture discourages people from genuinely “feeling” or “showing” their emotions. In addition, studies show that men have more emotional interactions while women have more emotional expressivity (Deng et al., 2016). As a result, the following section examines gender and emotions through the lens of key respondents’ narratives based on the above theoretical basis.

3.2. Left-behind Wives: An Analysis of Emotions and Experiences

Gender and emotional experiences are interconnected and mutually constitutive together. In this regard, scholarship in both the sociology of emotion and the sociology of gender has flourished in the last half of the twentieth century (Stets & Turner, 2014). Several studies have analyzed gender variances in the emotional expression and physiological arousals of human beings (Archer, 2004; Brody, 2009; Chaplin et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2010). According to Kemper (1990), in the study of emotions, “gender is a particularly significant differentiation” (p.15). Scholars from the field of social psychology and cultural sociology have stressed the role of gender in constructing emotions in our everyday interactions. Scholars including Denzin (1984), Clark (1987) and Gordon (2017) note emotion through a gender lens. The relationship between emotion and gender has profound ancient roots. Stets and Turner (2014) note that:

Simone de Beauvoir (1949, 2009), for example, showed how the ancient mind/body dualism was mapped onto the division of the sexes in a way that defined women as “the Other.” The dualism defined men as rational actors built for leadership and women as closer to nature and inherently emotional and thus requiring more control. (p.411)

From childhood itself, people are socialized to gendered emotional orientation in their everyday life. Even through the processes of naming and gifting specific-coloured things such as toys and clothes, parents and primary kin show gender differences and thus, children themselves identify themselves as boys and girls (Pomerleau et al., 1990). Parents and other family members have sex-stereotyped toy preferences while giving them gifts (Fagot, 1985; O’Brien & Huston, 1985; Weinraub et al., 1984). Studies report that girls prefer to play with dolls and soft toys; they like to dance and dress up and choose sex-segregated groups to play and do other activities (Caldera et al., 1989; La Freniere et al., 1984), while boys were given more sports equipment, tools, and large and small vehicles (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990). Besides, girls are more likely to wear pink and multi-coloured clothes, as well as pink pacifiers and jewellery. The boys wear a lot of blue, red, and white. They have a larger number of blue pacifiers. In the girls’ rooms, yellow bedding is more common, while blue bedding and curtains are more common in the boys’ rooms. (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit & Cossette, 1990). All these engendering processes affect each person’s emotions.

According to research on the parental socialization of emotions, when talking to daughters, both mothers and fathers use a wider range of emotional terms than when talking to sons. Additionally, certain feelings, such as grief, are expressed more often by daughters than by sons (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987; Fivush, 1989). These socialization patterns are unmistakably associated with parents’ beliefs that females should be more involved in the expression of emotion than males. Gender stereotypes tend to be ingrained in the value structures of children as young as 3–5 years old (Birnbaum, 1983). Young ladies are moulded to augment feelings that advance alliance and reestablish social holding, like warmth, empathic trouble, and disgrace, just as those that advance weakness and lower power, like dread and pity. The declaration of these feelings empowers the two genders to effectively achieve their future sex parts to keep up the current force and status contrasts between the two genders (Brody, 1999). Boys’ and girls’ emotional expressiveness are conditioned in the end (and perhaps unconsciously) to prepare them for the

effective completion of their future gender roles, with women's roles emphasizing association and caretaking and men's jobs accentuating intensity, strength, control, and ensuring others (Brody, 1999).

Here I focus on the expression of emotion among gender categories and not the subjective feelings of persons. Several schools of thought emerged solely on the consideration of whether emotions are merely humanistic or gender-based. Sarah Ahmed (2014) notes this with regard to feminist approaches to emotion:

Feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body (Spelman 1989; Jaggar 1996). Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgment. (p. 3)

Feminist scholarship has discussed the development of emotional discourses, 'gender-coded emotions' and emotional expressivity (Bondi & Domosh, 2003; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Hopkins, 2009). The emotionality of women and men has always been associated with society's cultural stereotypes and gender expectations. Right from childhood, girls are raised in a certain way. They are expected to be non-aggressive, sweet and loving. Brody (1999) notes that "girls are shaped to maximize emotions that promote affiliation and restore social bonding, such as warmth, empathic distress, respect, and shame, as well as those that promote helplessness and lower power, such as fear and sadness" (p.4). Even the choices of dolls and kitchen sets by a girl child and toy cars and toy guns by a boy indicate this fact. The way girls are nurtured and brought up has a major impact on the construction of emotions and likings. Socialization and stereotypical expectations influence the emotional expressivity of women, men and the third gender in society. Every gender category experiences some sort of 'gendered experience' in everyday interactions, and identities like masculine or feminine are constructed and contested in different spaces and times (Hopkins, 2009).

Being a member of a particular gender or culture leads one to engage in activities considered 'appropriate' for the group, and through these participatory interactions, one learns the skills deemed necessary to be a member of that group (Fivush & Buckner, 2000). Socio-cultural context has a significant role in the making of gender stereotypic socialization and emotional

expressivity (Brody, 1997; Shields et al., 2006). Brody (1999) states the various reasons behind the “development of gender differences in emotional expressivity”, including “biological differences, cultural pressures, family relationships, peer interactions” (p.1). Furthermore, whether or not there are gender variations in emotion is dependent on the type of emotional expressiveness examined: vocabulary, voice intonation, attitudes, physiological arousal, facial expressiveness, or a combination of these (Brody, 1999).

Hattwick raises the famous question in her article ‘Sex Differences in Behavior of Nursery School Children’: “Are there observable and significant differences in the behaviour of boys and girls? If so, can these differences be attributed to variations in social training and attitudes, or do they represent fundamental, innate differences in function or structure?” (Hattwick, 1937, p. 343). Nevertheless, scholars take this question as “which comes first, egg or chicken.” To put it differently, while there are sex variations in emotional expressivity, several qualitative shreds of evidence also argue that gender differences have an imperative role in emotional expressivity (Hess, Senécal, Kirouac, Herrera, Philippot, & Kleck, 2000; Kemper, 1990; Ubando, 2016). Towards this point, I describe the anecdotes by Left-behind wives which disclose their experiences and expressions linked to gendered emotions. I collected a variety of responses from key respondents and organized them according to the various themes.

3.2.1 Restrictive Masculinity and Expressive Femininity

Restrictive masculinity and expressive femininity are the core social constructs in any man-woman relationship. Numerous studies have analyzed men's and women's stereotyped emotions and emotional expressivity in cultural society. These studies argue that men are prone to more aggression and women to less aggression and affection (Birnbaum, 1983; Briton & Hall, 1995; Lyons & Serbin, 1986). Similarly, there is a direct link between emotions and gender roles, and the majority of the studies reveal that socio-cultural factors have contributed to gender-coded emotions. This means to say that women are socialized with gender-coded emotions, more specifically with feminine emotions. It is very normal in society to describe women who display less warmth and affection as the feminine version of masculinity. Such women are not defined as ideal women, and they try to imitate stereotypic behaviour occasionally. In sum, there are perceived emotions of men and women which underlie gender stereotypes. The socialization process has a crucial role in regulating our emotions and constructing the popular notion of ‘macho

man' and expressive femininity. In different words, all of us live by mental representations of emotions that we get through past experiences and prior histories. More clearly, emotions are always coupled with prior experiences and history (Hess et al., 2004).

Every society has a preconceived notion about the acceptable level of emotional reaction assigned as per one's gender. The Kerala society is also bound by those preconceived notions regarding emotionality. Through the in-depth conversations, I understood that Left-behind wives are forced to behave with gender-appropriate emotions in society due to the existing (preconceived) notion of restrictive masculinity and expressive femininity. Also, the reflexive emotions of each person in every society become largely contextual and depend on the display rules of the society. I have analyzed the differences between display rules and actual emotional expression among the Left-behind wives and their variances according to matrilocal and patrilocal setup. Psychologist Matsumoto (1990) defines display rules as:

Values concerning the appropriateness of emotional display that is communicated from one generation to the next. Appropriate emotional behaviours are also communicated but through observation. The appropriateness of emotional behaviours is judged against the shared consensus of display rule attitudes in combination with common knowledge concerning actual behaviors. Display rules, however, need to incorporate not only a dimension of expression appropriateness but also an evaluation of a behavioural response relative to appropriateness. (p. 212)

Understanding the display rules of a culture depends on the degree of appropriateness of actual emotional expressions in the culture. It also depends on evaluating the appropriateness of displaying emotions in various situations. The display rules are labelled as culturally prescribed guidelines acquired through the socialization process from the infancy period itself. Based on the display rules, men are supposed to express less affection and sadness. They are inclined to anger and courage. The notion of 'restrictive emotionality' of men also comes through the cultural society's display rules. Restrictive emotionality has been defined as "having difficulty and fears about expressing one's feelings and difficulty in finding words to express basic emotions" (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995, as cited in Wong et al., 2006, p.114). Some researchers have found that men's restrictive emotionality is connected to intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts in men and their relationships. Also, restrictive emotionality causes psychological maladjustment in men and produces negative emotions like anger and jealousy in them (Good et al., 2004; Jansz, 2000; Wong et al., 2006). Men affirm their masculinity through conventionally associated behaviour with men

and the attributions with masculinity. The data from the field points out that this sense of restrictive masculinity is highly dependent on the age of the respondent and that of her partner. The older the husband, the more restraint he practices in expressing his emotions; these hurdles have been crossed by the younger generations of migrants. Despite all these, fixing emotions for specific genders has become challenging in modern society due to gender-sexual fluidity.

During my initial interactions with a few key respondents, I observed that they preferred to project stereotypical gendered attitudes and behaviour in front of society. Most of them were not interested in deviating from the conformed category in society; rather, they wanted to be on the socially appropriate/acceptable list. Many respondents wished to be on the cultural society's accepted list. In some cases, when they felt awful about their family, they responded in a socially conformed manner to avoid getting a bad reputation in public. They assumed that if they did not fit into a socially acceptable category, they would be labelled as 'manly women'. Also, I purposively talked about my research theme without letting them know the 'research purpose' among the clusters of people at marriage, housewarmings, and other functions. The majority of them displayed the stereotyped/perceived gendered behaviour regarding their family system in front of the people. However, the intensive and constant personal dialogues with the key respondents helped me understand the nuanced dimensions of monetary dealings and family decision-making roles, which are bound by contextual influences/ factors. The study revealed that some of the key respondents, particularly those who live in separate homes or are part of a nuclear family, had more financial autonomy (with or without constraints) than those who live with in-laws. In this sense, I noticed the critical role of the socio-cultural context in displaying people's socially appropriated behaviour. On a similar line, I spoke to the key respondents in two different contexts and evaluated how contextual elements influenced their social behaviour.

In essence, space serves an important role in the activation of emotions and gendered behaviours. The emotions and behavioural norms in society are also influenced by gendered spaces, in turn. My point here is to show how the gendered space is nothing but the male space in the cultural context of Northern Kerala. According to Devika and Sukumar (2006), "In the discourse of development, a dominant presence in the Malayalee cultural sphere since the mid-20th century, "women" have always been a significant presence, especially as a way to represent Kerala as the utopia of social development" (p.4469). Kerala's Human Development Report

(2005) itself mentions “gender unfreedoms” as a fundamental flaw in the state’s human development record (Devika & Sukumar, 2006). Women’s status in the state is cloaked in ambiguity, as Mukhopadhyay (2007) describes it as a societal “enigma.” The matter at hand is that both practice and theory are contradictory in Kerala, and in reality, men continue to hold dominating positions and exercise authoritarian positions in society.

One of the interviewees, Mrs Basila from Malappuram district, 36 years old, a mother of two with secondary education, responded to the discussion with key respondents about emotional outbursts and gender disparities. She says:

They are men; they suppress their sorrows through aggression. Women are bound to remain silent and passive in front of their anger. ⁴⁷

Mrs Ansila, another respondent who is thirty years old, completed higher secondary education and has been residing with her in-laws, revealed:

I have never seen my mother talking back to my father or expressing her reaction to his aggressive stance. She had advised me to follow the same in my marital life, too. Men can express their irritation openly; society accepts it that way. Following my mother's words, I stay indifferent to my husband when he gets angry on me.

I received a similar response from Mrs Farhana, another respondent, who is 27 years old, and a graduate of the B.A. Afzal-Ulama programme, and the mother of a baby boy. She voiced out the following:

*Men are supposed to be dominating and powerful. I hate it when a man cries. Ideally, they should shout, screen and dominate women. If it's the other way around in a home, that place lacks Barkath*⁴⁸

These above conversations highlight notions around gendered emotions existing in society: showing anger, fighting and domination are included in ‘manly’ behaviour, and men expressing

⁴⁷ It is a frequent dialogue that I heard from most of the key respondents while speaking with them.

⁴⁸ It is an Arabic word that refers to the blessings of Allah. The word is commonly used among Malabar people, especially by the Muslim community, to denote something which is fortune and fetched from Allah (God) Almighty.

‘soft’ emotions are unacceptable to the social system. Men are shaped to minimize emotional expressions following their gender roles, with a few notable exceptions: rage, pride, and scorn (Brody,1999). There are behaviours conventionally associated with masculinity and femininity, and there are male and female versions of masculinity and femininity as well. Men affirm their masculinity through attributions of masculinity and conventionally associated behaviour with masculinity. Based on these in-depth observations, the research agrees with the constructions of gendered identity and the commonalities constructed and used. However, some men express their soft emotions, and those are exempted from the category of ‘manly man and further degraded to the category of ‘male version of femininity’ in society. Women who display courageous and bold behaviour are considered ‘masculine’, but this thought mainly comes from constructed notions about masculinity and femininity and the conventional behaviour associated with women. Everybody understands masculine and feminine behaviour, which is internalized through the socialization process of various social institutions in society.

Looking deeper into the field notes, I have come to know that restrictive emotionality has made harmful impacts on marital lives and leads to troubled relationships between partners. One of the respondents, Mrs Khalida, thirty-nine years old, completed secondary school and has been staying in a separate home near her husband’s elder brother’s home; she shared:

My husband has never sobbed in front of me. He gets furious when he is upset. There are times when he gets so angry that he openly expresses it in front of the kids. This has a negative impact on our sex life, such that I mostly avoid having any form of intimacy when he is angry. He often compels me to have sex with him. He is not concerned about my pleasures or comforts during sex. It gets painful and unpleasant.

The above narrative shows the consequences of the husbands’ restrictive emotionality towards their marital life. Some husbands never share worries and grief with their partners, leading to marital conflicts between them. According to Jansz (2000), “If men are – and must be – stoic, which means that they do not show their vulnerability and restrict their emotions, it will be problematic for them to engage in intimate relationships in which feelings are shared” (p.170). Men’s restrictive emotionality is distressing their partners and children, and other members of the family. However, the worst sufferers of restrictive emotionality are obviously the women.

Another respondent, Mrs Haseena, thirty-seven years old, mother of two children who resides in a separate home in her husband's hometown, says:

My husband remains stoic with others and reveals his feelings only to me. He is not comfortable with sharing his emotions openly in the presence of his family. We often try to deal with his problems in private and do something to relax his nerves.

The above personal excerpt shows the consequences of the restrictive emotionality of men toward others and their partners. It can also be viewed as men conforming to the notion of the ideal man in Kerala society by displaying macho attributes. As in a traditionally patriarchal system, the notion of concealing emotions is very much normalized and assigned to men in society. According to Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994), there are “two aspects of the macho stereotype: the use of physical force and the concealment of ‘soft’ emotions” (p.34). Boys reinforce their masculinity through attributions of masculinity and traditionally associated masculine behaviour. Everyone perceives gendered behaviour, which is ingrained in society via the socialization process. Furthermore, every person's behaviour and actions are grounded on this “structured grammar of gender” (Shreekumar, 2009). By conforming to the “structured grammar of gender,” men get “hegemonic masculinity” (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994), whereas women become “subordinate variants.” However, in a slightly progressive society, educated men and women break this boundary voluntarily and start to express their actual emotions, at least to their partners or primary kin. They try to break the conventional notions about gender roles as much as they can. Yet, even after their efforts, radical changes regarding gender roles could not be realized, and the obstacles to expressing their emotions without any shame will still remain. It is because of the existence of restrictive emotionality as a prevalent notion in contemporary society and the non-acceptance of exposing men's emotions in society. More clearly, it is because of the gender role orientations, stereotyped behaviour and gender conformity in each society.

3.2.1.1 Expressive Femininity and Emotional Outbursts

The section on restrictive masculinity and expressive femininity highlighted the anecdotes shared by key respondents about their husbands' restrictive emotionality. This section focuses on anecdotes of women's expressive femininity, specifically the women's emotional outbursts due to the physical absence of their partner. The physical absence of a spouse in the relationship makes most couples uncomfortable and unhappy. However, this uneasiness and misery are mostly

expressed by women. This expressive nature of the respondents benefited me in collecting more narrations. From the field, most of the Left-behind wives shared that the physical absence of their husband is always a painful experience for them which at some point makes them emotionally sensitive. Some of them have opened up about their sexual desperation during their husband's absence. The data collected from the fields shows that most wives are despondent and puzzled just after their husband's departure, owing to confusion as to how to continue life as usual; these are directed at women's emotions and their expressive nature.

One of the key respondents named Mrs Rashida, twenty-nine years old, a graduate and mother of a baby boy, who lives with her in-laws, shared the following:

During my period, I get terrible cramps and mood swings. My hubby takes care of me really well. He treats me like a kid. Therefore, I get really sad if he isn't present at those times. It feels incredibly good to be next to him, even when we are in bed together. His absence affects me the most. I really miss him. However, I feel a little better knowing that my son is here. I don't allow our son to sleep in between me and my husband when he is present. Whenever my hubby is around, I will sleep in the middle. That is something I miss.

Another important source is Mrs Shabana, a mother of two who is 32 years old, has completed her higher secondary education, and has been residing close to her husband's home. She stated in response to the same query:

It gets hard to hold on to my emotions after he leaves for work, especially the during the first few days. I constantly have the feeling that something is missing. I prefer not to wash the last shirt that he wore so that I can take a whiff of his sweat. I hold and kiss that shirt as I lay on my bed. That makes me feel as if he is still with me. People usually remark that for Gulf migrants' wives, the wait before our husbands return is pleasant. Nobody can understand the extent of our anguish; it is excruciating.

Mrs Raheena, a mother of three who has completed her secondary education and is 38 years old, elaborates on her experience after her husband left for the Gulf:

After he leaves, I go to the bathroom and cry. I never go to the airport to drop him off. I don't know how I will react. His father, brother, and our children accompany him. I

despise travelling to the airport because it is so depressing. I'm always on the edge post his departure, and I end up taking it out on my children. I won't be able to focus on anything. Sometimes when I cook, I use too much salt, or I put tea dust in a dish instead of sugar. I get irritated with my children for no apparent reason. It takes me a week to get back to normal. The initial days are excruciating. Sometimes I hold his shirt close to me to get over the pain.

Mrs Shareefa, an interviewee from Malappuram who is 40 years old and lives with her two children in a separate house close to her husband's ancestral home, shared the following experiences:

I'll have no appetite and will constantly break into tears once he leaves for work. I don't even feel like cooking. Focusing on anything becomes challenging. I remain restless till the time I get to hear his voice on the phone. Once we start talking, I gradually come back to the track.

Habeeba, another respondent who is 35 years old, a mother of two, and a graduate of high school, resides with her husband's parents. She talked about her first-ever emotional reaction to her husband's departure:

I can't stand to think of the day when he left for Dubai for the first time. I sobbed hard and was not able to sleep for the next two to three days. I was depressed. I couldn't even brace myself to cook. It took me about a week to get over it. That is mainly because we have never stayed away from each other since marriage. Even now, I get emotional whenever he leaves. And the news of his return makes me delighted.

Mrs Farzana, a 32-year-old degree-holder who lives with her kid at her in-laws' house and enjoys doing crafts, experienced the following difficulties:

I get sad the moment he leaves. The first couple of days are quite hard. During those days, I always prefer to keep to myself. I hardly speak to my son. When he packs to leave, I often hide one of his shirts for myself. And I immediately leave for my house from my in-laws' place when he leaves. That brings me some solace. It's like a change of space. It would be too distressing to see the spaces that we shared. I gradually try to

make myself feel better over the next few days by doing things I enjoy. I enjoy crafts, so I channel my energy into them to feel better. I don't have any other option.

These narratives illustrate the suffering and anguish of the Left-behind wives, as well as women's expressiveness and the strength and valiancy of emotions. In other words, Left-behind wives used to endure a "new form of widowhood" in their marital lives in the context of migration. The spouse of a Gulf migrant nearly seems like someone who does penance for a few days of getting together. Most of the potential respondents reported that they had experienced some emotional pain in the absence of their husbands, and some of them had mental trauma as a result of their emotional imbalances. Depending on their emotional resiliency, some women were able to handle crises promptly, while the majority took a little longer.

I also got the opportunity to talk to the husbands of the Left-behind wives during the fieldwork about their sorrows and dooms as a result of leaving their loved ones at home and travelling abroad for work. However, the majority of them responded that going to work was normal for them and that they didn't have any such emotions. The majority of them countered by asking who would take care of the financial needs of the family if they weren't able to, how they could spend all of their time with family, etc. They managed to answer my queries without dwelling in depth regarding their feelings. Some of them even made fun of me for asking these questions. However, their responses and attitude toward the questions seemed to me to suggest that they were simply trying to exhibit "restrictive masculinity" and conform to gendered emotions.

The physical absence of their spouses caused sadness for the wives who were left behind. Even while technology makes it possible to communicate with others whenever we want, the women felt incredibly alone and hopeless at home. Several other respondents also experienced the same emotions with regard to their husbands' possessions and belongings and kept them beside them for several days after his departure. They said that they did not wash their husbands' clothes on purpose so that they could act as their companions in bed. This indicates their sensitivity. Women are socialised in such a manner that they are not cautious about exposing their weak spots in public.

Further, some of the key respondents shared their experiences during the period of their pregnancy and childbirth. One of the most emotional experiences in a person's life is giving birth to a child (Sessions, 2012). Therefore, each person needs the emotional support of their beloved.

A good support system during pregnancy, birth, and the post-partum period benefits the mother and infant from a physiological perspective (Patel & Sharma, 2000). In addition, a number of women have discussed the dread and trepidation they had during childbirth as a result of their nosocomephobia⁴⁹ (hospital phobia). Every wife I observed yearns for their partner to be there in such circumstances, perhaps to comfort and care for them. Additionally, the majority of women anticipate love and affection from their loved ones. However, in the case of the Left -behind wives, the majority of their husbands left for work overseas shortly after two months of pregnancy or before learning the results of the pregnancy test; this puts them in a vulnerable emotional position due to their biological changes.

Mrs Haseena, an interviewee who is 36 years old, a mother of three, and a graduate of higher secondary school who has been residing in a separate home next to her in-laws' home, stated the following:

My husband was not home for all three of my deliveries. He was in Madras during the first one and in the Gulf during the other two. It is obviously stressful. I would have been relaxed if he had been around. I expected him to be there during my son's birth, but he was in Madras then. He had to leave for the gulf immediately after. We can't share our cravings with everyone. As he used to send me money, it was not that bad. The money came straight to my bank account, not to my in-laws' accounts.

I had two premature deliveries; it was during the eighth month. I had health complications too, so I had to get operated on. I was admitted to the government hospital for a few days. I had a tough time there. But my son was born in a private hospital; I was comfortable there. I was admitted only for six days. But during my other delivery, my baby daughter was in the ICU because she was premature. I had to walk around with all my stitches; that was painful.

I am sure it would have been easier with my husband around; at least there is someone to comfort me when I am in pain. I feel it is not worth much when someone else says it. When the husband comforts you, it is a source of happiness.

⁴⁹ Hospital phobia—the emotional turmoil that an individual experiences that escalate into a kind of fear while in a hospital or in its related premise. This can also be triggered by previous experiences related to the said location.

Mrs Saleena, another crucial respondent who is forty years old, an Arabic postgraduate, and the mother of three sons, recounted her experiences in detail:

When I was pregnant with my first baby, my husband was home for two months. He used to take me to the hospital; things were going well. After he left, the next seven months were hard. Going to the hospital was a tough task. Travel was a problem for us as we lived in a hilly area. It was hard even to get transportation. And even in the hospital, I had to run around and do everything on my own--like getting tokens, paying bills, going to the lab to get tested and then going back again to collect the results. I had to do it all when I was really weak and tired. I would feel really sad looking at other couples outside the gynaecologist's section. It wasn't jealousy; I was just missing my husband.

It was during this pregnancy time that I really felt his absence. Otherwise, I was always busy with household work and barely had any time; I used to think of him when I was done with work and finally got to bed. But I started craving for his presence during pregnancy. The happiness when the doctor hands over the newborn baby to your husband, it's indescribable. If he's not there, you can't experience that.

Also, I can't ask any random person to get me things or buy me something. The freedom I have with my husband is something else; I don't have it with anyone else, not even with my brother. There have been many instances where I had many cravings, but I couldn't tell anyone. When I was in the ICU, I got water and bland food. Finally, when I moved to the room, I started getting constant cravings. It would have been easy to tell this to my husband. He would have been more than happy to buy me anything during that time.

When I was pregnant with my younger son, I had the worst time. The family was not very happy about the timing of this pregnancy. But God gifts you some things at a certain time, right? My mother-in-law taunted me badly. And this pregnancy was when I was a bit older, so I developed varicose veins. It was very difficult. I had to do all the household work on top of that. We had no staff to help us. Mother-in-law would get angry and leave the house at the smallest of things at that time. Maybe it was because

of her disease; she was an Alzheimer's patient. I have had the darkest of thoughts during this time. I had no one to share my sorrows with. Even when I had to go to the hospital, I had to pack my bags myself and go there. Most women have people who pack their bags for them. I can't even think of it now.

My mother couldn't accompany me during this pregnancy due to some health issues. She was there for the other two, so I didn't have to take so much trouble. I was missing my mother too. My brother took me to the hospital at that time. There was so much confusion at the hospital. I had to pay a lump sum amount, but I didn't have the money for it. I thought I had to pay only after delivery. Several calls were made to coordinate and get the money issue sorted. My husband would have taken care of all of this if he were around.

An immigrant's wife really understands her partner's value when he's away. Now that my first son is a bit older, I don't have to worry about running household errands. It's been 22 years since marriage, but if we calculate the amount of time that I've lived with my husband, it'll only be around three years. My only happiness is when they come home. It's said that true believers become happy on two occasions--when they break their fast and when they finally meet God. But for an immigrant's wife, real happiness comes on three occasions.

The preceding narratives deal with the emotional experiences of women, particularly those of pregnant women, and how they dealt with situations in which their husbands were away for work when they desperately wanted to be with them. In all of these instances, the key respondents stressed cravings and the need for their husbands to buy goods for them. One of the respondents correctly noted that “*the freedom you have with your husband is something else. You don't have it with anyone else*”, demonstrating the emotionality of intimate relationships and the emotional comfort provided by the husband’s presence or physical proximity. There exists a powerful link between intimate relationships and the emotionality of women. The following subsection explores the relationship between close relationships and the emotionality of the Left-behind wives and also throws light on how they display their emotions in diverse spaces.

3.2.1.2 Intimate Relationships and Emotional Manifestations

Intimate relationships have always been important in women's emotional manifestations (Brody, 1997). The contextual frames of family members and close friends were used to analyse how emotionally receptive women are. I have noticed differences in the emotional expressiveness of women in close and distant relationships. Women end up expressing their anger and fury towards their male partner more than anyone else such that she also vents out their rage toward their intimate people (Barnes & Buss, 1985; Levenson et al., 1994; Notarius & Johnson, 1982; Parelman, 1983). One of the main respondents was Mrs Nabeela, a twenty-eight-year-old graduate and mother of a son who lives with her in-laws. She states:

Because I am close to my mother, sister, and husband, I usually vent out my rage with them. It's not like I yell at them in front of others. What I meant was that I retort when they say something that I don't agree with. It's not the same with others. I haven't fought with my mother or sister as frequently since my marriage, as I'm closer to my husband now. As a result, I end up expressing my anger in front of him. Nowadays, instead of arguing, I attempt to discuss and reason with my mother. I was the closest to them before marriage., I used to have many arguments with them before marriage, as I was closer to them then.

Similar sentiments were voiced by Mrs Muhsina, a 31-year-old mother of two who has completed her higher secondary education and resides in Kozhikode district with her in-laws.:

As I am very close to my husband, I vent out my rage on him. I don't generally reply or quarrel with anyone else, not even my husband's mother. We fight in our private space. I don't want anyone to witness our arguments. I remain cold and silent with him at times or directly lash out at him.

There are various situations, such as marital disputes, when women express wrath more frequently than men. Men react to hostile events in a variety of ways, including cardiovascular reactivity and speech intonation features that women lack. (Brody,1999; Gottman & Krokoff,1989; Gottman and Levenson 1992). According to Brody (1999):

The quality of women and men's emotional expressiveness depends on a host of interacting factors, including the nature of the situation they find themselves in,

who the participants are, what culture they are from, what ages they are, and what social roles they play. (p.2)

Most Left-behind wives express their emotions directly to their husbands over calls or messages. They get informed about everything at home and their surroundings through messages and respond to them quickly. Modern technology has enabled them to connect easily and has made long-distance relationships into regular, strong and intimate ones. The wives of early migrants had no opportunity to express their feelings and emotions and faced emotional up-downs in the absence of their husbands. As against this, wives of late migrants had chances to talk to their husbands whenever they wanted in private. Compared to the wives of early migrants to that of the late migrants, the former had no chances to talk privately and had to communicate with their husbands in front of family members and neighbours. The letters would be handed over to husbands' friends, and they would return back with the trust that no one else would read the letter but their husbands. In the next chapter, I will discuss these aspects.

The way in which a woman emotionally expresses herself toward her husband is constantly linked to their relationship dynamics. When a husband and wife get along well, they confide in one another and depend on one another emotionally. However, some women are afraid of their spouses and refrain from expressing their emotions openly. Additionally, the majority of married women behave very differently in their husbands' families than in their own. They convey absolute submission, which is frequently misconstrued as a choice. They behave very differently from how they would in their own houses, indicating that the space affects comfort and emotional expression. Women who are left behind are typically viewed as submissive or docile members of their husbands' households. The majority of them attempt to conform to societal conventions in order to be an "ideal" wife and daughter-in-law in the context of Malabar's cultural milieu. In brief, women's emotional expressions are regarded differently over time and space, and it is influenced by a variety of intersecting factors.

In addition, women are more at ease when they are with their spouses and do not feel pressured to live up to societal norms, such as the prohibition against women leaving the house alone after midnight. The partner's presence helps them to avoid the male gaze and other unpleasant thoughts while reaching home at night, as nobody is going to complain about them when they are with their respective partners. In short, women's emotional security and their

partner's physical proximity are inextricably linked. In the following section, I will take up some collection of stories narrating the physical closeness of husbands and the emotional security of wives, as well as how women view their partners' physical closeness in marriage.

3.2.2 Partner's Physical Proximity and Emotional Security

The concept of emotional security has always been associated with two aspects; physical proximity and the joy of physical contact (Parreñas, 2005). In general, individuals want a companion who can soothe them emotionally and can relate to them. Married individuals typically have their husbands as a companion. Because of their psychological and physical affiliations with their spouses, they feel safer and more at ease. Therefore, their spouse's presence and emotional connection to one another are necessary for their mental well-being. The majority of the Left-behind spouses talked to me about the connection between their husbands' physical presence and the emotional security/comfort that came with it. These women feel more emotionally secure and relaxed in the presence of their husbands. Mrs Haseena, an important respondent who is 35 years old, has two sons, completed her secondary education reveals:

I always like spending time with my husband. I get an unrivalled sense of comfort from him, and his presence always makes me happy. Me and my children enjoy his presence. Having him around soothes my heart. And I don't want to be bothered by the people around me and their unwelcome remarks. Apart from the petty fights among us, I'll be in a very relaxed state of mind. I always love the moments with my husband.

Similar opinions about emotional security were expressed by Mrs Shareena, another participant, who is 36 years old, a mother of two, and a graduate of secondary school. She lives in a separate house close to her husband's house. She says:

I remain happy in his presence. If I have any troubles at my husband's house, he will help me. I feel safe and is not interested in the made-up stories going on around me. When he is not present, my in-laws and sister-in-law make up stories about me, but when he is present, there is no issue. He does not require any third-party evidence or detailed information, believes me. When he's in the gulf, most of our disputes and arguments revolve around these third-party narrations about me. Except for a few squabbles, I don't have any big problems in my marital or family life.

Another important respondent, Mrs Sakeena, who is 39 years old, a dropout from the eighth grade and a mother of two, recalled what had happened.:

My husband was highly sceptical of me and used to keep a tab on everything I did. This issue of suspicion worsened and reached its zenith when he was in the Gulf. I thought of getting a divorce several times and went into depression. My parents, who knew about the situation, forced me to go for a consultation, and I did it to retain my emotional stability. Finally, with my parents and his parent's continuous discussions and financial support, Alhamdulillah⁵⁰, he started a small business here and settled here for one year. He started to mellow down after that. He no longer restricts me. I am getting full freedom for everything when he is with me. I totally enjoy the freedom, and many of my friends are jealous of me.

The key respondents' personal narratives, which are included in the aforementioned excerpts, highlight the connection between the Left-behind wives' emotional security and their husbands' physical presence. The concept of emotional security and safety has always been associated with men's physical proximity in the social system. Man's physical presence has been converted to extend as a privilege that restrains the male gaze, thereby enabling patriarchy to a glorified stance in the society. Therefore, I inferred from the key respondents' extracts that a person's emotional safety and emotional experiences are an outcome of the societal norms, roles, and conceptions.

Man, his presence and absence significantly impact women's emotional well-being as well as their mobility. As a part of the normative perceptions of women, there exist certain socially acceptable constraints and restraints for them (Kodoth & Varghese, 2011). The cultural context in Kerala has traditionally limited/constrained women's access to public spaces. Public spaces are always considered to be male spaces (Nair, 2007). As a result of prevailing societal notions of public spaces as masculine spaces, men's physical presence is always coupled with women's security, and males are perceived as 'protectors' of women. Kodoth and Varghese (2011) correctly observe that "marriage is expected to protect women and to 'secure' their movement" (p.21). Due to these prevailing notions regarding marriage in Kerala, widows, single women, and single

⁵⁰An Arabic word which means praise be to Allah

mothers encounter a variety of poor treatment from society and are seen as powerless agents in society. They are perceived as a subordinated and subjugated group in society. This does not necessarily mean that they are constantly physically harmed, but there is an enormous mobilisation against them. It is possible to interpret this from the standpoint of Gramscian hegemony, which develops and manifests itself through consent rather than coercion. Women who do not have a male protector face a great deal of discrimination in Kerala society. The attitudes within the specific gendered spaces offer differential chances to men and women, leading to differentiated outcomes. As a result, in every social setting, the majority of them conform to socially acceptable behaviour and stereotyped emotional expression.

3.2.3 Gender, Conformity and Stereotyped Behaviour

Social psychologists Fiske and Stevens (1993) point out that “people who do not conform to stereotypic behaviour may be punished through social rejection, whereas people who do conform may be encouraged or rewarded for such behaviours in the form of social approval” (Fiske & Stevens, 1993, as cited in Brody, 1997, p. 370). By looking at the nuanced experiences of the Left-behind wives, Fiske and Stevens’s arguments could be proved right. One of the respondents named Mrs Sabina, thirty-five years old, who has completed higher secondary and is a mother of two, who stays in a separate home near her husband’s home, explained:

I am conscious of the fact that people keep a tab on my travel. I can feel people watching me whenever I get home late or travel alone. People used to spread rumours about such women, and I am terrified and wary of them. I also heard some rumours about my close acquaintances. My husband frequently requests me to keep an eye out for accusations against 'gulfukarante bharya (Wife of Gulf husband)'.

The interviewee, in this case, complies with social norms since she and her spouse seek out social acceptance from society. While appropriating the stereotypical behaviour, they receive positive emotions from the surrounding people. Mrs Mubeena, a 29-year-old mother of a child who lives with her in-laws, is another respondent. After being married, Mubeena's career as a nursery school teacher came to an end. She recalled:

I was a very talkative person. I never shied away from interacting with anyone. My family members often rebuked me for the same. The problem became worse after my

marriage. Everybody from my husband's family treated me as a 'masculine woman'. They treated me as a delinquent woman; his relatives associated me with 'unusual' behaviour. I feel horrible when they do that.

Fiske and Stevens' words are applicable in the Malabar setting through a thorough investigation of the field. I learned that the primary respondents encountered social rejection as a result of defying social norms and stereotypical behaviour. Mrs Jumaila, another important source, is 34 years old, has three children, and lives close to her in-laws' residence in a separate house. Her husband had migrated to Saudi Arabia as a construction worker, and she responded:

I always reach home before Maghrib prayer⁵¹ wherever I go. My parents taught me this habit during my childhood. I am appreciated by My husband and in-laws for the same. My in-laws often compare me with my co-sisters and give me high regard because of this behaviour. I won't encourage the habit of going out and reaching home late. I will never do that!

These excerpts demonstrate how a woman conforms to stereotypical behaviour. Some people fear social rejection and seek social recognition and approval. I had the opportunity to speak with some of the primary respondents' husbands, which opened up some important aspects of the study. I deduced the reason for the migrant husbands' discontent with their wives' mobility from our informal conversation. The majority of men did not want their wives to be targeted by their gossip-mongering neighbours and relatives. In other words, they wanted their wife to be the ideal woman in society. Moreover, to secure their wives from gossip and rumours, husbands instruct their wives to conform to the whims and fancies of the patriarchal society and encourage them to gain social approval. The majority of husbands want their wives to be on the 'socially accepted' list and force them to adhere to the gendered expectations or beliefs that are prevalent in society. From their responses, I have noted the gendered behaviour and its conformity in society.

⁵¹Maghrib prayer is a prayer which is performed just after sunset and is one of the five obligatory prayers performed by practising Muslims.

Further, I have also noted the stereotypical attitudes towards a women's mobility in the absence of a male; who is primary kin to the women or has a relationship affinal⁵² or consanguine⁵³, has also been observed. A key informant, Mrs Nashwa, twenty-nine years old, degree qualified and having a kid, who is staying with her mother-in-law, shared her experiences regarding her mobility in her husband's absence:

It was my friend's brother's wedding. A group of my friends decided to have a get-together. I had informed my friends in advance that I'll be coming from my in-laws' place and that I'll have to leave before it got too dark. But it was around 5.30-6.00 pm in the evening when they reached. It was an evening function, and I was planning to get back home by 6.30 pm. I didn't notice the time passing by, as my friends came and we went inside and started talking. After some time, I got really scared when I just stepped out. It had gotten really dark. One of my friend's husbands was also there; they came in a car. They offered to drop me home. But I was still scared. I was constantly trying to tell my friend that we should leave. But she wasn't worried as she was with her husband. If I had my husband here, even I wouldn't be scared. But it was just my son and me this time. My friend and her husband decided to finally leave due to my constant bugging. I know my mother-in-law won't say anything to me, but I feel very awkward. If my Ikka (husband) was here, things would have been different.

In the cultural context of northern Kerala, the presence of adult men is critical to family endurance, decision-making, and also for women's mobility. Socio-cultural factors enforce the restrictions on women's mobility (Banerjee & Raju, 2009; Lingam, 1998). Devika (2009) states that Kerala society expects an ideal woman to work solely for the benefit of their family, where her mobility is "limited to the space of the home" (p.26). Public spaces are nothing but the spaces of men (Nair, 2007; Ruddick, 1996). According to Valentine (1990), "Men also dominate public space through their assertive and aggressive behaviour, which intimidates and embarrasses women" (p.300). In

⁵² Kinship based on marriage is called affinal. Affinal kin, or affines, are relatives by marriage or your in-laws; if the marriage ends, they no longer remain affine.

⁵³Consanguineal kin (or consanguine) are relatives related "by blood". The phrase "of common blood" in the Latin *consanguineus*, from which the word derives, suggested that all Romans were descended from the same father and thus shared the right to inherit from him.

sum, women's mobility has some limitations in accordance with time and space, and it varies across cultures. Lindberg (2009) spotted that:

While their husbands are away in the gulf, these women have a certain amount of freedom to leave the house if no other male relatives are available to do the shopping or run errands; but this is a freedom with restrictions. (p.101)

The Left-behind wives challenged the status quo in some instances in a restricted manner. Most women experience a kind of insecurity and uncertainty in the absence of their husbands due to cultural restrictions on their mobility. However, they deal with the reality of their husbands' long and regular absences⁵⁴. Kodoth and Varghese (2011) argue that marriage "decrees access to a greater degree of physical mobility than she may previously have had" in society (p.21). In another article titled 'Gender Roles in Martial Art: A Comparative Analysis of *Kalaripayattu* Practices in India,' Mandakathingal (2021) talks about women's visibility in public spaces after marriage. "Women who stopped practising and performing *Kalaripayattu* after marriage reported that their husbands would take too much "care" about their body movements but were not interested in watching their "bodily activity" in public" (p.320). In the Kerala context, a woman's visibility and mobility after marriage are inexorably linked to her husband's opinion and acceptance. Whether they are received happily or bitterly may hinge on the gender dynamics between them. Furthermore, many married women do not travel alone from their in-laws' homes to their own homes. She will always be escorted to her own home and back by her husband. If he is not around, one of her brothers or parents or the senior members from the husband's place will escort her back and forth. '*Kootikonderal*' and '*Kondennakal*' are local usages that imply 'escort her back and forth' between her home and her in-laws' place. These usages are literally and symbolically infused with gendered meanings.

On the contrary, most of the women travelled without any male member throughout their college years and also travelled from their home to their uncle's or other cousins' homes using public transportation and other means before their wedding. Marriage restrains their mobility in unsaid ways. However, many women travel unaccompanied, using public transportation and their own vehicle, for familial and other purposes and in the absence of their husbands; even in that movement, they try to conform to the appropriateness of the society. In addition, there will be a

⁵⁴ See more in 5th chapter

list to adhere to, sent by the husband to make way to the social acceptance catalogue. People receive positive emotions when they are on a socially accepted list and receive negative emotions when not on it. This acceptance depends on the two relational dimensions- power and status, as suggested by Kemper (1978).

3.3 Social Relationship Dimensions: Power and Status

The dynamics in the emotional life of the Left-behind wives are dependent upon their social/cultural/economic situations. Power and status can also determine a person's socioeconomic and cultural status. As I mentioned earlier in the structural theory, power and status, play a crucial role in activating and expressing a person's emotions in different contexts. According to Kemper (1981), emotions are mostly the product of social interactions, which involve components of social status and power. Using this Structural theory of emotion, I try to explain the emotional states of the Left-behind wives at their homes and in their husband's places. Except in the Kuttichira region, the majority of people in northern Kerala, particularly in the Kozhikode and Malappuram districts, prefer the patrilocal form of residence (See Table -2.1). As a result, after marriage, most women relocate to their husband's families and stay with them. Due to this system, no women expect their husbands' parents to treat them in the same way their own parents treat them; both are distinct, one is an affinal⁵⁵ kinship, and the other is a consanguineous⁵⁶ one. Therefore, the emotional expressivity and emotional attachment among these groups are different. Emotional expressivity also influences people in social relationships through factors of status and power. Even the emotional and social stability of the Left-behind wives from well-off and poor backgrounds are different. In a nutshell, my argument here is that, like any other identity/category, the Left-behind wife cannot be taken as a monolithic identity/category. Rather, we need to recognize the differences/hierarchies within that identity/category.

⁵⁵ Marriage is referred to as affinal kinship. When a person marries, he/she forms a bond with not just the girl/boy he/she marries, but also to a number of other members of the girl's/boy's family. More clearly, affinal kinship refers to those kins related through marital bonds (husband, father, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, etc.).

⁵⁶ Consanguineal kinship refers to those kins who are related through blood (e.g., mother, siblings, offspring, etc.). The term consanguinity means a close relation or connection; it is named after the Latin word "*sanguis*," which means "blood."

People with high status and power always get positive emotions such as happiness, satisfaction, excitement, and hope, whereas people with low status and power receive negative emotions such as anger, sadness, depression, and hate (Simon & Nath, 2004). Kemper's structural theory discusses these aspects in detail and argues that power and status are the two basic dimensions of social life. He distinctly describes the categories of emotions engendered by changing the combination of status and power levels. Bericat (2016) rightly notes Kemper's argument in his article titled '*The Sociology of Emotions: Four Decades of Progress*':

According to Kemper, there are two basic relational dimensions: power and status. Actors with power, or who gain power in an interaction, experience positive emotions such as satisfaction, confidence and security, while actors with a low level of relative power experience negative emotions such as fear. Actors with a high level of status, or to whom others give deference, will feel positive emotions such as pride, while those that lack status, or lose it, will feel negative emotions such as shame. (p.500)

While extending these insights into my research and analyzing the status quo of the key respondents, I understood that status and power play a critical role in the approach of in-laws towards their respective daughters-in-law. Based on these two relational dimensions and other interwoven aspects, there is a differential attitude towards the Left-behind wives from in-law's house. According to the field data, many respondents have experienced bias from their in-laws due to their low economic level compared to their co-sisters, while others have had negative experiences because of their physical beauty and their family's low social status. In short, a person's power and status are largely determined by the family's high economic status, which induces both positive and negative emotions. One of the key respondents, Mrs Shareefa, who is thirty years old, has two kids, completed her secondary school schooling and lives with in-laws in the ancestral home, expressed:

Whenever I and my co-sister face problems, my mother-in-law always supports co-sister due to her family's high economic background and social status. My in-laws always support her during every situation. I never got that privilege from them due to my family's low economic background. I always received a dissatisfactory gaze from them for every silly matter. This gets high during my husband's absence. My mother-in-law used to boast about my co-sister's ancestral home in front of me and degrade

my ancestral home due to its lower status in society (social hierarchy). Due to all these, I am not particularly fond of staying with my in-laws in the absence of my husband. I never felt at peace in his home.

Another respondent, Mrs Shaheena, forty-three years old, completed 9th class schooling, has three children and has been staying in a separate house near her husband's younger brother's house revealed:

During the initial stages of my marriage, I encountered numerous difficulties and discrimination from my in-laws. They would come to me to vent their rage, frustration, and hatred. Even when I was unwell, they expected me to do all of the chores. They simply didn't care. I was treated as if I'm a servant at home. I'm certain that it's due to my parents' low socioeconomic standing. My parents were unable to arrange an extravagant wedding, and they were not able to provide expensive gifts to the groom's family at that point. My family, however, began presenting expensive gifts to my husband's family after my brother became financially stable. As a result, my in-laws' attitude softened.

Mrs Sajina, a key respondent, has been living with her husband's parents at his ancestral home while her husband has been working in Kuwait for seven years. She teaches Arabic at a nearby LP school and has two children. She had negative experiences with her husband's family before getting a job, especially while her husband was in the Gulf. She shared:

I was insulted by My husband's family in front of relatives and neighbours for a long time, especially when my husband was away. They had treated me and my family with contempt. There were days when I felt worthless. I can still remember those awful days, and they remain the most unpleasant for me. Later on, they started treating me better once I obtained a job.

In the narration described above, two scenarios are presented: the first is the absence of a husband, and the second is the financial security that women experience when they have a job. The woman's status and level of power may not matter when the husbands are around, and she may have pleasant emotions. Women, on the other hand, go through negative emotions while their husbands are away. However, as the woman started to make money, or in this case, became financially independent,

the situation changed. These things, however, are dependent on the type of family, the pattern, and other interconnecting aspects. Moreover, through the key respondents' narrations, I have also analysed that even husbands face the problem of status and power in wives' families⁵⁷.

Mrs Khadeeja, another participant, is a thirty-two-year-old mother of a baby girl. When she was a senior in high school, she first met her future husband, and after three years of being in a relationship, they got married. They faced a resounding rejection from Khadeeja's family because of the economic disparity between the two families. Her husband was often subjected to discrimination at her home because of his low socioeconomic status. She reveals:

It was a love-cum-arranged marriage, and we struggled hard to keep it that way. My family was adamantly opposed to this union due to my husbands' lower socio-economic status in comparison to mine. My brother, too, does not treat my spouse and my sister's husband equally. My brother-in-law hails from a well-established family with high social standing. As a result, my brother is always drawn to my sister's husband. In addition, unlike my sister's husband, my husband has no say in any of my family's crucial decisions. This behaviour has always caused me and my husband a great deal of pain.

Mrs Haseena, a key respondent from Kozhikode who is 40 years old, has passed the eighth grade, and is a mother of three children, also discussed their experiences with their family as a result of her husband's low socioeconomic standing. She shares:

My family is financially secure in comparison to my husband's family. As a result, when he is not around, my siblings always belittle him, and when he is present, they act in flashy phrases. My husband is well aware of the fact that the derogatory language they use enrages me. While I'm concerned about this, he constantly reassures me by saying that they don't treat him badly while he is present.

These excerpts bring out the significance of an individual's social position in relationships. In this context, husbands face the same problems, and their intensity varies for each person. Some of them are not getting any manifested responses due to the low social position of the partner's

⁵⁷ If a family has more than one son-in-law, there is a comparison, and the one who has a higher economic status always receives positive emotions from others.

family, but at the same time, some of them face problems due to this. In-depth interviews depict that the intensity of the inappropriate behaviours from the partner's family toward women is high compared to men due to cultural factors. Cultural and economic factors play a pivotal role in emotional expressivity (Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Matsumoto, 1990). The cultural society defines an individual's expressive behaviours and subjective feelings, which vary from person to person depending on intersecting factors like education, employment, type of family, residential pattern, locality and others.

Furthermore, several key respondents stated that the intensity and mode of emotional expressions and reactions vary between their own homes and their husbands' homes. As per the cultural system in Malabar, women are passive in their husbands' homes compared to their own homes. It is all due to the fact that their power and status in their own homes differ from that of their husbands' place. Not only the relational dimensions such as power and status play a major role in producing emotions and emotional reactions, but there are other aspects as well. As cultural theory points out, our emotions are influenced by our society's culture. Cultural beliefs shape the differences in emotional manifestations. Cultural conditioning even urges people to keep sexual assaults or abusive incidents in their lives a secret, such that they keep them hidden. As a result, incidences of dowry, and gender-based violence, such as sexual, physical, and verbal assaults, both within and outside the family, go unreported and receive little attention, just like any other crime. According to a report released by the Kerala Police Department (2021), 12,659 crimes against women were reported in 2020, including rape, molestation, kidnapping and abduction, eve-teasing, dowry death, cruelty by husbands/relatives, and other offences. As I mentioned earlier, this report may not exactly reflect the number of crimes against women perpetrated in a particular year; there could be multiple cases that go undocumented or unnoticed. In the following part, I will attempt to trace the experiences of sexual misbehaviour toward the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala and their emotions regarding the same.

3.4. Experiences of Sexual Misconduct and Emotions

The challenges faced by the Left-behind wives are based on multiple factors, like the absence of their husbands and the prejudices that society, including their family and neighbours, meet towards them. The majority of the Left-behind wives went through a range of awful experiences as a result of the prevailing prejudices and stereotypes regarding them (See Table 2.2-Bad Experiences faced

by Left-behind wives from their Friends and Neighbourhood). In this light, I deem it important to understand the treatment of society towards them as many of the Left-behind wives were subjected to abuse from a multitude of different and unexpected persons and sources. Prior research has demonstrated that harassment has terrible mental health implications for women, particularly melancholy, anxiety, somatic complaints, and suicidal tendency (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003; Haj-Yahia, 1999). While most of the key respondents are hesitant to disclose their personal experiences involving physical abuse, I found out that the majority of the wives are victims. To put it differently, as *Gulf* wives, they had all been subjected to abuse, both within and outside the family. But only a few of them were willing to share their experiences in detail.

One of the major respondents, Mrs Rajeena, who is 38 years old and has completed her secondary education, lives in a separate house in the Malappuram area with her three children. Her husband emigrated to Kuwait to work as a shopkeeper and returns home every two months for a holiday. She explained her experience:

I have had an unfortunate experience once. I was out to get some groceries. This was in my husband's hometown. Almost everyone in the town knows him. I usually take an auto to get back home after buying rice and other groceries for home. So, this one time, the auto driver helped me keep the heavy bags inside the vehicle and everything. There were too many things. It was half an hour's journey back home. A few minutes after the ride started, the auto driver started talking to me. I felt there was something off about his tone. He asked me how things were with my husband; does he call me every day and things like that. I didn't like how the conversation was going. I tried to ignore him and replied only in monosyllables. I just wanted to get home, and I felt I didn't have a choice. When we reached home, he acted completely normal and didn't pass any more comments. So, I opened the gate, and he drove the auto inside. Because there were too many bags to carry inside, I thought it'd be better to take the auto inside. And the auto driver helped me carry the stuff. So, when he was doing that, I unlocked the front door.

It's just me and my kids who live there. My husband's aunt, who lives nearby, would come at night to sleep with us and give us company. But in the morning, there's no one else but me and my kids. And this time, the kids had gone to school. So, after the auto

driver was done helping me, he said he wanted to wash his hands. So, I let him inside the house. Suddenly he tried to grab me, but I shook his hand off. I asked him to get out of the house and warned him that I'll tell my husband about this. Then he threatened me, saying if I talk about this incident with anyone, he'll go around town saying that I was the one who lured him inside. He was making sexual advances at me. But when he realised that I wasn't willing, he hurled those threats at me. I never told anyone about this. It's only after two days that I told my husband about this. I couldn't keep it in any longer. My husband said he'll deal with it when he comes back home. My kids don't know about it yet.

Several scholarly studies in Kerala have highlighted the pregnant silence practices related to the topics of women's sexuality and the degradation\devaluation of the female body in the public realm (Devika, 2009). The threat of male sexual assault, whether explicitly or implicitly, to exercise control and hence dominate women's use of space and mobility is prevalent in the state (Valentine, 1990). Most of these women are cautious about reporting their terrible experiences for fear of social alienation and stigmatisation. They do so to safeguard their reputation, along with that of their families. However, such harassment and violence towards women can be linked not just to women's passivity and apprehension but also to the persistence of patriarchal norms. The legitimacy of a male voice always matters in these situations. It is critical to understand how the male voice establishes legitimacy and dominance in Kerala society by relegating women to a subordinate position. Devika (2006b) observes in her article titled 'Negotiating Women's Social Space: Public Debates on Gender in Early Modern Kerala, India' that:

The authority Man and Woman were supposed to have access to was also seen to differ greatly. Man's authority was to be derived from political influence, economic strength and intellectual prowess, while Woman's seemed to be derived entirely from her attributed power over emotion and sentiment. It was a non-coercive power that worked through 'compassionate words and deeds', tears, prayer and gentle advice, which seemed 'natural' to women. The woman whose behaviour did not confirm the complementarity between Man and Woman would lose the claim to such authority. (p.47)

Society expects women to behave in a servile and unconditionally obedient manner; this should be exhibited even in her body language. Despite the power and safety assured to her in the

name of law and the judiciary, she remains the target point of society. There exists a “masculinist protectionism” (Devika, 2009) in Kerala society, which ascribes men to the dominant position and legitimacy in the cultural society. Terrified of being harassed in public places, women make themselves invisible in public spaces and restrict their mobility.

Fasna is an important respondent who is thirty years old, a mother of two, and who has completed her higher secondary education. She later went on to do a computer course. Her husband constructed a home for them near his hometown. She disclosed the obscene text messages she received on her phone, saying:

One incident triggered me badly. I once visited the Akshaya Centre to apply for a scholarship for my daughter. The staff there took down my personal details for the same. I told them that my husband is in the Gulf. That night, when I was about to call my husband, I got a text from a person who was sitting next to me in the Akshaya centre⁵⁸. He introduced himself as the guy from the Akshaya Centre and asked me, "I know that your husband is in the Gulf. So, what are you up to?" I didn't like his tone, so I ignored these messages. But later, I received an unsolicited picture of his penis. It was a traumatic experience. I blocked his number right away, but that didn't help me to get over that initial shock. The trauma is too real. I know I received that message just because he knew I was a Gulf migrant's wife. I have no clue as to how he got my number.

The majority of these women are not ready to complain officially in the police station or other women's commission offices and are more concerned about their reputation and the status of their families in society. Even now, people feel that reporting women's issues to the police/authorities is not respectable; the fear is that society will degrade their status and bring on shame to the family. Thus, they do not immediately report such incidents, preferring to maintain an immediate silence and later share things with intimate people. They are caught in a mental rut

⁵⁸ Akshaya centers refers to the government authorised service centre for updating the Demographic and Biometric details of a resident. The permanent enrolment centre of Akshaya also performs the Aadhaar Updation work across Kerala.

during their period of living as a Left-behind wife in society. Also, as a marginalized group in society, they remain invisible in the dominant narratives and discourses.

The public discussion of women's sexuality and their exposure in public places may be viewed as not being representative of the ideal Kerala woman (Devika, 2009). Discussions concerning sexuality, the legitimacy of masculine expression, and women's access to public areas are all grounded on the notions of ideal manhood and womanhood in Kerala society. Society expects men and women to express themselves in masculine and feminine ways, and societal institutions, by means of socializing the individuals in gender centric manner, assert that conforming to these expressions is the only way to become the ideal woman or man in society.

3.5. Feminine Emotionality and Expressiveness in *Kathupattu*

While loosely translating the *Kathupattu* – letter-songs, one can grasp the feminine emotionality and expressiveness. These songs portray the difficulties and emotional turmoil that migrant workers experience when they are separated from their families. According to Muhammed Ali (2010), the origin of *Katthupattukal* can be traced back to the emotions associated with the breakup of lovers or husband and wife. The presence of *Kathupaattu* was so widespread that many people returned from the gulf. This reveals their link to the *Mappilappaattu*⁵⁹ and the extent to which these songs affected every person in the society (Musadhique, 2016). The popular *Kathupattu* is used here to explore the emotional gestures of Gulf expatriate wives. Let me start this section by giving an account of the *Kathupattu*, written by S.A Jameel, a famous *Mappilappaattu* poet and lyricist in Malayalam Literature.

The song starts,

“എത്രയും ബഹുമാനപ്പെട്ട എന്റെ പ്രിയ ഭർത്താവ് വായിക്കുവാൻ സ്വന്തം ഭാര്യ എഴുതുന്നതെന്നാലേറെ പിരിശത്തിൽ ചൊല്ലീടുന്നു വസ്സലാം....”

⁵⁹*Mappila Paattu* (or Mappila songs) are a folklore Muslim song genre written in Arabi Malayalam with lyrics and a melodic structure (Ishal) by the Mappilas of Kerala, India. Mappila songs have a distinct national identity while being inextricably related to Kerala's cultural practices. Apart from Arabic and Malayalam, the songs frequently use words from Persian, Hindustani, and Tamil, but the grammatical syntax is always in Malayalam. They are often sung during the occasions of birth, marriage, and death and deal with themes such as faith, love, humour, and heroism. Mappila Paattu is considered by some to be the most famous branch of Malayalam literature, and it is an integral part of the heritage of Malayalam literature today.

“with the expectation that my dear beloved husband will read this letter, your wife is extending pleasantries to you.”

(full version of the song is provided in Appendix, see Appendix-2)

Although S. A. Jameel penned the song in 1976, it remains popular even today.⁶⁰ It was the first song, which is celebrated the song’s Silver Jubilee in a great function at Vandoor⁶¹ in 2011, with a tribute to S.A Jameel (Vishnurosh, 2011). For any society, art and culture are essential, and it lights our inner lives and enriches the emotional world. According to Koya (1983), as part of documenting the socio-cultural context of Kerala Muslims and the background of Malayalam literature, Mappila literary works played a crucial role in it. The letter-song ‘*Ethrayumbahumanappetta ente priya bharthavu vayikkuvan*’ (Oh my dear beloved husband), which is a letter from a wife to her husband in Abu Dhabi, demanding his return, and the reply duet ‘*AbuDhabeelullorezhuthupett’I*’ (A letterbox in Abu Dhabi), which is the husband’s response to his wife, are among S.A. Jameel’s most popular works. Among these two songs, I chose the song ‘*Ethrayumbahumanappetta ente priya bharthavu vayikkuvan*’, which indicates the emotional state as well as the emotional expression of Left-behind wives in the absence of her beloved husband. Moreover, by his family tradition, the poet had practised as a psychiatrist. As a result, the poet has sat down through various psychiatric counselling sessions with a number of Left-behind wives in Malabar which helped him in describing the women’s anguish due to their husbands’ migration. The women sought counselling and medication because they were in emotional turmoil as a result of their husband’s prolonged absence.

The ‘Dubai letter-song’ vividly captures the emotional eruption of Left-Behind wives, which caused considerable havoc in the emotional world of Gulf Migrants' lives in the 1970s and 1980s. In the song, the woman starts by letting her husband know how miserable she is and how these feelings of hurt have reduced her to tears with no one willing to assuage them. She continues by explaining how none of the worldly comforts she has, such as a stunning home, designer clothes, etc., bring her joy. All the luxuries that money affords her are not an antidote to her grief. She goes on to speak about her three-year-old child, who constantly asks about his father. Her

⁶⁰ The song is very famous among the Mappila songs, which people still love to sing and listen to it in its entirety and it can be heard on a variety of TV programs and stage shows.

⁶¹ Vandoor is a town in the Malappuram district of Kerala, India

heart breaks at the sight of her young child calling out for his father, having never known him. She describes her pain in poetic words likening it to the situation of a flightless bird. Her life feels like being consumed by the fires in hell; the sea separating them seems as restless as she is. She has buried all her hopes and dreams now; her marital home now felt like a prison confining her, crushing her grieving heart closer to the end. She speaks of the desire of the flesh, longing for her husband's physical presence. She assures him that she would languish in her burning desire but would never be unfaithful. She terribly misses her husband's physical presence, fondly reminiscing about their honeymoon days. The gulf is a land of harvesting opportunities; she thinks of it as the land of gold itself. While he toils under the hot sun, she gets to enjoy the fruits of his labour. She asks him, wouldn't a life with less, but a life together be better? She concludes the letter by asking him not to let any of this sadden his heart; she only wants him to come back to her, to be with her. Till then, she would wait on their marital bed, hoping that his love and desire for her would bring him back home. In short, the song describes the helplessness of the wife of a Gulf expatriate, which in some sense, portrays the experiences of all the Left-behind wives. This song steals the audience in each line, and the poet captures every emotion with utmost precision.

As always, literature and the media do a fantastic job of conveying emotions. The woman expresses her emotional outburst resulting from isolation and loneliness, as well as informing her spouse about their physical and mental needs. As I previously stated, there are letter songs or reply songs from the husband's side, but they do not express the intense emotions or explicitly express the emotions regarding the separation, which is due to the fact that both husbands and wives are socially, culturally, and psychologically moulded differently in expressing and hiding their emotions, as I indicated above. From the field, I got to know that while there had been no more cases of psychiatric counselling for men regarding separation, there had been a number of cases for wives, indicating the predominance of gendered emotions in society.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the solitary communication source between the Left-behind wives and migrant husbands was letters. The Left-behind wives and the migrant husbands used to express their emotions through letters exclusively. The Left-behind wives would give the letters that they pen down for their husbands through their relatives, neighbours, and friends, whoever goes to the same place where their husbands stay, and migrant husbands also do the same with the trust that they would not read the letter. One of the key respondents named, Mrs Shahana, thirty-nine years

old, completed secondary school, has two children and currently stays in their newly built home near their in-law's home; she shared her memory regarding the letter writing and cassette tapes:

We used to send letters and photographs to each other before the mobile phone arrived. I usually give it to one of his friends who was going back to the gulf from Kerala. He also used to send letters to those friends who were coming to Kerala. I would write in detail about all the things happening at home. I also used to send him cassettes in which I recorded our voice voices. He used to enjoy all of it since it was the time when our kids started to talk. It helped him feel connected. Even now, we have some of those cassettes lying around at home. These days we are into video calling, and things are much easier in terms of communication. We have so many photos and memories of our children with us now, as I used to send him so many photographs. I used to go to a studio with the kids and get photos clicked. When my husband returned from the gulf, he would bring albums of those photos.

The communication between migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives was dominated by letters and cassette tapes before the 20th century. They would send cassette tapes and letters of three to four pages every few months. Along with the letters, they send photographs of them and their children. Along with an increase in communication options, the late 1990s saw the debut of mobile telephony, inexpensive international calls, and the Internet (Madianou & Miller, 2011). After the 1990s, there were more opportunities and channels for communication, which made it easier for migrants to maintain connections despite being geographically separated. Additionally, these long-distance relationships were influenced by media technologies and computer-mediated communication (CMC), which will be addressed in detail in the following chapter (See chapter 5).

Summary

An individual's emotional responses are typically influenced by a variety of elements, including biological, socio-cultural, and economic considerations. As people become more sociable, their emotional development also evolves. Cultural differences may result from differences in normal and habitual forms of being and interacting. The cultural background of society has an impact on the relationship between emotional state and gender. Belonging to a particular gender entail participating in a particular group and acting in a way that is appropriate for that gender within

that group. Emotions are constructed in a variety of sociocultural contexts. The direct and indirect emotional reactions in each society have evolved in compliance with social structures, cultural norms and social customs. Relational (structural) dimensions shape people's emotional activation and expression to a certain extent. This means that the emotional variance is determined by a person's social status and power.

In everyday experiences, society plays a critical role in forming, creating, and describing emotions. The majority of respondents' emotional expressions may vary depending on the person and the other interlocking categories that bound them. More clearly, various intersecting factors bind a person's emotions in our society. Class, locality, sect, educational attainment, employment, residential pattern, and structure all have a role in how they express their emotions openly. The emotional expressions of the respondents differ over time and space, they display socially appropriated behaviour, and the stereotyped emotional expressivity depends on the social context. By examining their profile and the setting of each narration, the data was given further depth. People speak from various 'I' viewpoints, change positions, and integrate positions. Because of this, each respondent's personal emotional experiences as a Left-behind wife remain unique. The research conducted in the area of migration focuses on the dimension of technology that connects people across the globe. Technology plays a major role in strengthening the emotional bond that exists between transnational couples. The next chapter of this thesis attempts to explore the pros and cons of modern technology on par with gender and emotions.

Chapter IV

Technology and Gender: Surveillance on the Left-behind Wives

This chapter aims to elucidate the advantages and disadvantages of modern technology in the day-to-day lives of the Left-behind wives and its impact on their communication with their respective migrant husbands, thereby attempting to document their views on modern technology. More clearly, the chapter tries to understand how these women situate modern technology within their family system and how technology exerts a self-disciplining mechanism in their lives. The emphasis is on migration and the advancement of communication technology, which both empowers and disempowers the Left Behind womenfolk. The chapter is divided into three sections. The significance of modern technology in the lifeworld of Left-behind wives in the contemporary world is covered in the first section. The second section explores the role of modern technology as ‘surveillance technology’ in the lives of the late migrants’ wives in a virtual society. The third section examines how technology impacts gender. The study uses primary data gathered through conversations with the respondents and their relatives on essential issues concerning gender and technological surveillance, emphasising the instances regarding power relations between husbands and wives to understand how modern technology works among them. The concluding remarks are presented at the end of this chapter.

4.1. Modern Communication Technology and Left-behind Wives

The process of migration began in the 1970s, and the rate of migration has gradually increased in each decade since then. Along with this trend, the number of Left-behind wives grew. However, there is a distinction between the *Lifeworlds* of the wives of early migrants and late migrants⁶². The primary reason for the diversion was the emergence of massive technology, as well as its proliferation and growth into the public realm. Modern communication technology has evolved and is now widely accessible, and it has gradually assimilated into our daily lives. New

⁶² I used the terms early migrants and late migrants here to indicate those individuals who migrated before the twentieth century or before the advent of communication technology was termed early migrant, and anyone who migrated after the twentieth century was labelled a late migrant. Late migrants are able to communicate with their loved ones via mobile phones and the Internet, whereas the early migrants were devoid of this opportunity.

communication technology is widely acknowledged to be quickly and affordably accessible in all spheres of society and to offer significant advantages. According to Walter (2021), in the virtual era, aspiring spouses regularly use mobile phones to build a deep, loving relationship before they get married, following their engagement or legal marriage (*Nikah*⁶³). The field research also revealed that, with the advent of communication technologies, many young women speak on the phone with their future partners, possibly after the engagement and *Nikah* or before the wedding reception. In addition, the field data show important disparities in the *lifeworlds* of wives of early migrants and late migrants after the spread and accessibility of communication technologies, as with aspiring spouses in the modern/virtual period. The experience of aspiring spouses in the pre-virtual and virtual era is different due to the modern communication technology, which has also (re)shaped the forms of relationships that exist between them.

The emergence of Information and Communication Technology has benefited, allowing people to maintain virtual social relationships with the families they have left behind. Therefore, the current chapter has turned out to be important from that point of view. After the 20th century, communication technology became an inevitable element in human society's daily life, specifically in the lives of migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives. Scholars of transnationalism have seen advanced communication technology as a central element of transnational migration and a crucial tool for the kind of "time-space compression" that David Harvey (1990) proposed. Hannaford (2015) argues that breakthroughs in communication technology in the previous twenty years have enabled migrants to maintain social and economic engagement in several regions of the world or to be transnational. Technology has helped migrants keep in touch quickly with their loved ones at home and allowed them to maintain social, political and economic ties in both the host and home countries, simultaneously participating in two (or more) local spheres (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 2005). Communication between transnational spouses has expanded significantly because of mobile phones and internet-based communication. It also assists long-distance couples in overcoming physical proximity and compensating for their physical separation. Married couples can use their cell phones to negotiate marital intimacy

⁶³ In Islamic law, marriage – or more specifically, the marriage contract – is called *Nikah*, an Arabic word which is used in the Quran to exclusively to refer to the contract of marriage. *Nikah* is formal marriage for Muslims.

without talking face-to-face (Walter, 2021). Through ICT-enabled communication, couples are able to provide emotional support to one another.

The influence of modern technology on family life and marital life is worth mentioning here. Lie and Sørensen (1996) rightly note that technology is adapted to everyday forms of life, and everyday forms of life are adapted to technology, enabling people to be a part of “bounded sociality” (Ling, 2008). Levitt (2001) points out the ways in which long-distance calling via the Internet permits more accessible and more intimate connections between those who migrate and those left-behind. The growth and development of communication technologies (like the Internet, social media and smartphones) have contributed to the startling emergence of a new social environment of pervasive connectivity (Baldassar et al., 2016). Ling’s (2008) concept of “bounded sociality” denotes those relationships that can be maintained across geographical proximity with the help of technology; it can be applied in the case of the Left-behind wives as well. I learned from the field that most of the respondents have a sense of feeling of being together with their husbands through this connectivity, which helped reduce the feeling of loneliness in their physical absence. It is primarily due to the prevalence of ICT-based co-presence in their daily lives. A group of academicians, including Loretta Baldassar, Mihaela Nedelcu, Laura Merla and Raelene Wilding (2016), rightly note that:

...The intensive use of internet-based communication, mobile phones and social media can contribute to strengthening ties and intensifying the circulation of various (cultural, emotional, economic and social) resources within transnational families. The uses of these technologies may also facilitate intergenerational solidarities at a distance, expanding transnational emotional and other forms of support. (p.134)

The advancement of communication technologies enabled transnational families to a “connected family” at a distance (Madianou, 2012). Most people in transnational relationships are in a “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004). These married couples regularly cope with physical distance by communicating via messages, video calls, and audio messages, a kind of “connected presence.” It enabled them to connect with others through regular telephone calls and instant messaging, video and audio call chats, SMS, and regular mail on social media like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and others.

Massive development and the easy accessibility of technology began to determine and differentiate every person's social role; this can be clearly understood from the Left-behind wives' situation, specifically the wives of early and late migrants. The study looks at the impact of modern technology on two generations and asks how it alters society's social role and status. In the case of the two generations studied, one is flourishing and growing with modern technology, while the other is not. One of the respondents, named Suhara, who is the wife of an early migrant who is currently leading their retirement life with their grandchildren, compared her situation to her daughters. She recollected:

My husband was one of the first-generation emigrants from his family. We got married after his second arrival. I was fourteen at that time. Three months after our marriage, he left for the Gulf again. he used to write letters for me, and those were the first letters that I ever received in my name. I used to reply hand over the letters to his friends, relatives, neighbours, or anybody who was going to his place. Nowadays, everyone has a mobile phone and internet connection. They can talk and do video calls daily. My son and sons-in-law call us even when they are at the airport.

This comparison demonstrates how communication has changed dramatically as a result of the introduction of devices such as computers, phones, and mobile phones, as well as visual enhancements (Jahan, 2021). Prior to the ICT era, wives of early migrants experienced a severe communication gap; however, youngsters have never confronted such a circumstance. Computers and communication technologies allow individuals to interact with one another in ways that are complementary to traditional face-to-face, telephonic, and written modes (Lee, 2002). The convenience offered by these technological advancements significantly lessens the communication gap between migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives. Their emotional connection strengthened due to the proliferation of communication technologies in distant relationships. With the emergence of new media and polymedia environments, people started to feel a sense of belonging, strengthen ties, and stay in touch across distances.

Increasing dependence on communication technologies plays a vital role in the transnational relationship between migrant husbands and Left-behind wives. In addition, I learned that most Left-behind wives use smartphones for entertainment, such as watching their favourite shows (such as reality shows, cooking videos, vlogs, religious scholars, and others). Instead of

spending time doing nothing, sleeping excessively, or avoiding troublesome thoughts, many of them use smartphones to make their leisure time productive or enjoyable. To put it another way, they want to engage them and make them happy. Smartphones have aided them in reducing their loneliness and keeping them occupied. One of the key respondents said that she used to watch cooking vlogs; she specified two cooking channels (Shamees Kitchen⁶⁴ and Kannur Kitchen⁶⁵), and she experimented with various meals, preparing them for her husband when he returned home. Moreover, all key respondents talked about the advantages of communication technology and its inevitable role in developing intimacy and lovemaking between couples. Acknowledging the positive aspects produced in the communication realms by new forms of technology and its wide popularity in transnational contexts, I unfold the field data on the impact of new modes of communication technology and the subsequent opportunities it opened up.

One of the key informant's husbands shared:

Since we are using smartphones for communication, especially WhatsApp and IMO⁶⁶, I feel like I am more involved in what is going on at home. I have started feeling more included these days. Nowadays, I get photos and videos of every event that happens at my house, from which I can recognise my relatives and friends. I don't feel left out anymore.

The above narration throws light on the advantages of “connected presence” in everyday life and the feeling of ‘being at home’ across physical proximity. Above all, the new communication patterns lessen the emotional and geographical interruptions between transnational

⁶⁴Shameera PR runs the YouTube channel “Shamees Kitchen”. Shameera is from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, and specialises in easy vegetarian and non-vegetarian Indian food recipes, with a focus on ‘Indian cuisine’ and ‘international cuisine.’ Her YouTube channel has a huge number of followers. She focuses on creating and sharing easy-to-follow recipe videos that employ commonly available goods and posts videos on a daily basis. She started the YouTube channel 'Shamees Kitchen' in September 2017. Shamees Kitchen has uploaded 904 videos on YouTube till date (31/12/2021)

⁶⁵ Kannur Kitchen's YouTube Channel has 1.5 M subscribers with 1067 videos uploaded so far (31 December 2021); the overall channel views are 62M. The channel focuses on traditional Kannur/Malabar cuisine and collaborates with sponsors to advertise their products to their YouTube subscribers.

⁶⁶ IMO is a video calling and instant messaging app that is free, simple, and fast. It equips us to send free messages and video calls to our friends and family, no matter what device we are using. The IMO app makes use of encryption services to ensure that all of your conversations, chats, and any data you provide with the app are kept as secure and private as possible. When it comes to choosing between IMO and WhatsApp, the Slant community prefers IMO for the majority of people.

couples. Further, modern communication technology, such as online or mobile phone conversations, is significantly used to mediate premarital romances (Walter, 2021). Mobile phones, as a “tool of the intimate sphere” (Ling, 2008), allow exclusive access for a closed interaction and transform online platforms into private networks; thus, before partners share a physical space like a bedroom or house, the smartphone can provide virtual space through which to interact (Gergen, 2002).

According to the field data, most marriages among respondents (81%) are arranged (see Table 4.1), which implies that these couples are unfamiliar with each other and use smartphones to familiarize themselves even before their wedding or after their engagement or *Nikah*.

Table 4.1- Respondents’ types of Marriage

Type of Marriage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Arranged	100	81
Love marriage	1	1
Love-cum arranged marriages	23	18
Grand Total	124	100

More specifically, couples in the Malabar region are likely to be new to each other when they are newly engaged or married, but they can keep the relationship alive by sharing their emotions, including all of their joy, despair, anxiety, and excitement, via their phones. Technological advancements enable spouses to communicate in real-time, mainly through messaging apps, even regarding routine activities such as cuisine preparation, childcare and other routines. One of the primary respondents, Habeeba, who is 28 years old, a graduate, and the mother of a young boy who is five years old, mentioned that:

As we have a cell phone now, it is easy to enquire about anything; I even phone my husband to ask for the recipes of the mouthwatering dishes that he makes, which my son adores. He forwards me a list of all the ingredients and preparatory instructions in audio notes. I usually send him an image of the food that I prepared, along with a video of my son eating. I often show him the dishes I cooked that day via video chats and images on special occasions. When someone (like our cousins) comes to visit us after a long period, I usually take their photographs and send it to him as soon as possible.

Another important respondent, Rizwana, who is 35 years old, a mother of two kids, and has completed her higher secondary education, resides in a separate house next to her in-laws' house, shares:

We do regular video calls and discuss about the happenings at home. I also send him the videos of our daughter playing dress-up and other stuff. Even in the case of any fights between kids, and if they are not talking to me, I will call their father and give them the phone. He cajoles them by offering them any gifts or chocolates. He knows to handle them well.

These narratives reveal the delight of the respondents in being able to communicate with their husbands anytime from anywhere due to present technology. Shareefa was another respondent; she is 29 years old, a graduate, and the mother of one child. Shareefa was willing to share her experiences, and I received good hospitality even before I had explained my purpose for visiting her. She struck up a conversation about her ambitions and college days, and through her exchanges, she expressed her sadness about not being able to study the way she had expected. Eight years ago, Shareefa's husband began working in Oman. She recently obtained her passport and is waiting to obtain her son's passport in order to visit her spouse. She and her child are currently staying with her in-laws, and her husband is the only son of his parents. She shares about the “connected presence”:

I received my first phone as a gift from my husband after our engagement. It will always remain close to my heart. Recently, when it got damaged, he bought me a new Android phone. Now I use WhatsApp and Instagram on it. We frequently do WhatsApp video calls and BOTIM calls. It's quite useful in the sense that we don't feel that we are far away. It helps in maintaining intimacy. Depending on his free time, he may call me twice or thrice a day.

Shareefa's account highlights the “connected presence” in her life through mobile phones. Another respondent, Mrs Ruksana, is 36 years old, has two children, and completed secondary school. She shares:

The smartphone had made it easy to connect with my husband. We do video calls as we please and keep sending photographs to each other after dressing up. When he travels, he

sends us pictures. I didn't have a smartphone two years ago as I didn't know how to operate one. Two years into owning a smartphone, I consider myself an expert now.

Mrs Haseena, another respondent, shared a similar perspective on her smartphone proficiency and ownership.

I have had a smartphone for three years, and before that, I was not aware of its existence. Since there were many misconceptions regarding the phone, I was hesitant to use it. I never encouraged any talks on the purchase of a smartphone for me. Later on, my husband made me understand the possibilities of using a smartphone. My younger sister helped me to learn the basics, especially YouTube and WhatsApp. I faced some difficulties initially, but later on, I got used to it.

The accounts of Ruksana and Haseena illustrate their qualms about using a smartphone for the very first time. The majority of the key respondents shared the same view. Nancy Baym (2010) pointed out that dystopian concerns are a normal response to new technologies, especially when their use and societal repercussions are beyond their control. As indicated by field data, most of them use smartphones and have become experts in their use.

According to the field data, 121 respondents own smartphones, whereas the remaining three do not own smartphones. Still, most of the days, the remaining three respondents use their primary kin's smartphones to communicate, share photos, and make video calls with their partners. Also 87 respondents are experts in using smartphones, while 37 are not. This ownership and expertise throw light into the digital literacy of the Left-behind Wives in their everyday lives. It points toward the accessibility of communication technology and the ubiquitous connectivity between migrant husbands and Left-behind wives. This connectivity helps them lessen the feeling of alienation and creates an ICT-based co-presence in their lifeworld. Lately, mobile phones have played an instrumental role in transnational relationships. According to some studies, mobile phones and other information communication technology give a sense of security, mutual accountability and a strong bond between family members while staying away or during the time of physical separation (Christensen, 2009; R. Ling, 2004; Røpke, 2003).

In addition to their ease of use and connectivity, smartphones enabled the respondents to deal with nasty calls and texts from sexual predators. They used sophisticated technology to prove

their innocence to their husbands and families when they received these intrusive calls. Shareeja, a respondent who is twenty-nine years old, a graduate, and a mother of one child, shared her experiences with obtrusive phone calls and messages as well as how she handled them. She explains:

I have been using a smartphone for some time now. Once, I got continuous calls from an unknown number--voice and video call on WhatsApp. I did not take the video call since the number was not saved. When I attended the voice call, I heard a man singing and flirting at the other end. I was petrified. I disconnected the call and informed my husband about it. He asked me to record the conversation if he called again. When I sent him the recording a few days later, he warned the guy and dealt with the problem. My husband would have never believed me if I told him someone was randomly calling me like that. Thanks to the smartphone and its call recording setting. WhatsApp also provides an option to block a caller. My cousins have also faced similar instances.

Haneena, an important source who is thirty-two years old, has two children and completed her higher secondary education, related a similar account. She shared:

One time I got multiple calls from an unknown number at night. Even though the number was somewhat similar to my husbands', I didn't attend the call. After some time, I started getting messages asking for my photo. It was 12 at midnight, and I was confused seeing that. I blocked that number immediately. I did not have time to inform anyone since it was an odd time. Later, I told my husband about the incident and forwarded the screenshots to him. We also tried to find the person who had called me. The only information that we got was that it was a Saudi-registered number. This happens a lot. I usually block the number if I get such calls or messages at midnight. Smartphones open up such negative aspects, too. One should be prepared to face it. In WhatsApp, we usually end up blocking unknown contacts.

Unwanted calls from unknown numbers plagued the majority of respondents, but they blocked the numbers and shared screenshots of the chats sent by the unknown persons with their husbands. They also forwarded the call recordings (if any) to their husbands. These are the most commonly cited problem-solving strategies among the respondents. The majority of the key

interviewees claimed that these resources aid in resolving significant disagreements between them and their husbands.

Additionally, most respondents reported that their husbands bought them a smartphone as a gift so they could communicate easily. Information on the respondents' smartphone purchasers is provided in Table 4.2. The data shows that 78% of the respondents got their smartphones from their husbands; in Kerala, the bridegroom usually gives the bride a brand-new smartphone following their engagement or *Nikah*. Only 8% of the respondents reported getting their smartphones from their fathers and 9% from their brothers.

Table 4.2- Purchaser of Smartphones for the Left-behind Wives

The purchaser of Smartphones for the Left-behind wives	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Brother-in-law	1	1
Elder sister	1	1
Father	10	8
Husband	97	78
Nil	3	2
Self	1	1
Brother	11	9
Grand Total	124	100

The majority of migrant husbands actually gifted their wives smartphones to enable their emotional bond or affinities. Surprisingly, this virtual space is crucial in overcoming physical proximity as well. The importance of face-to-face encounters in the present day is called into question since it demonstrates that physical proximity is not necessary for maintaining connections and social ties. I have also noted that all the respondents use virtual space for sexual gratification with their partners. Most of them ring their partners frequently and spend at least an hour talking to them; depending on their husbands' leisure time, this time may go over. In short, our means of communication and our everyday life have been affected by the ubiquitous mobile phone. Modern communication technology has become an essential component of their modern life, and it

(re)shapes their everyday modes of living. Technological advancement has significantly curtailed the communication gap between partners, specifically between migrant husbands and their Left-behind wives. Having stated the convenience and accessibility opened up by communication technology, we shouldn't be turning a blind eye towards the negative impact that it might bring on.

While critically examining the role of technology in 'empowering' the Left-behind wives, the differences in the social connection between early and late migrants' wives by means of technology became evident. I examined and recorded data from prior research conducted in the late twentieth century when current communicative technology was still in its infancy. Scholars conducting the study in the 20th century cannot be expected to find the differences between the early and late migrants since the fundamental differences became visible later. The point is that a clear distinction exists between the impact of communication technology on the wives of early migrants and late migrants due to the differences in terms of access and changing social connections in relation to technology. With a deeper understanding of the impacts of communication technology in the day-to-day lives of the Left-behind wives, specifically the wives of late migrants, I have focused on the nuanced aspects of the impact of technology and changes in time and space. Conversations with the wives of late migrants helped me to think beyond the peripheral idea of the impact of modern technology. The following table (4.3) presents how respondents felt about smartphones in their everyday lives and how many said it is a boon, a bane, or a combination of both.

Table 4.3- Smartphone: Boon/ Bane in Respondents' Lives

Smartphone: boon/bane	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bane	10	8
Boon	17	14
Combination of both (boon and bane)	94	76
No smartphone (Nil)	3	2
Grand Total	124	100

Table 4.3 shows that 94 (76%) of the 124 respondents believe that smartphones have advantages and disadvantages in their daily lives. Eight per cent of the respondents talked about the negative aspects of the same in their life, whereas 14% talked about the benefits of smartphones in their lives. In essence, technology affects these women's lives in both a favourable and detrimental manner. The following section looks at the opposite result/negative influence on the lives of the respondents, despite the fact that technology is frequently praised for or connected with its limitless potential and chances.

4.2 Modern Technology as ‘Surveillance Technology’?

Technological progress has inevitably created a dependence on technology (Grimes & Sun, 2014; Lee, 2002). It has been noted that society has a cyclical co-dependence on technology, which has begun to take control of our lives (Younes & Samer, 2015). Critically analysing the social role of technology in transnational family dynamics, Hannaford (2015) says:

In the intimate negotiations of transnational married life, (these) women feel profoundly ambivalent about the role of communication technologies in their lives. Instead of enabling ‘emotional closeness’, the virtual presence of their absent husbands frequently represents a specter of suspicion, control, and surveillance. (p. 43)

In the modern virtual patriarchal society, modern technology is connected to the Left-behind wives in terms of two conspicuous notions of protection and monitoring (Jahan, 2021). How this idea of protection worked in the pre-colonial era, how it still exists in the postcolonial/current administration setup, and how it survives now are serious questions (Jahan, 2021). Ultimately, protection entails monitoring, which entails the use or abuse of power. For example, many Left-behind wives have expressed dissatisfaction over their husbands’ insistence on submitting all the details of their expenditures. In a sense, this articulates the power relations that exist between a wife and a husband. In this context, technology provides the environment for such an interaction. Most Left-behind wives are compelled to send all their bills to their husbands through WhatsApp or other virtual spaces. Most of the Left-behind wives are compelled to send all their bills to their husbands through WhatsApp or other virtual spaces. One of the key respondents named Sumayya (thirty-five years old, having three children, completed secondary schooling) shares:

WhatsApp has made it easy for me to communicate with my husband whenever I please. But I started feeling the burn of it when he started demanding proof of the household expenditure; I am expected to send in bills for each and every penny spent. I find it difficult as I usually end up misplacing the bills, leading to arguments between us. Sometimes I feel that, If I couldn't have a smart phone, I would not have had to take so much trouble to send him the bills. With WhatsApp, it has kind of become a burden. Of course, the smartphone is great for sending photos and doing video calls. But there are two sides to it, both good and bad.

The majority of key respondents have similar perspectives on the pros and cons of using smartphones. They cherish both sending and receiving images and videos from their spouses. At the same time, these women prefer not to engage in instrumental conduct with their partners (Jahan, 2021).

This chapter argues that modern technology exists around the idea of power/knowledge; consciously or unconsciously, it fosters “invisible patriarchy”⁶⁷ in the current social context. New ones akin to an “invisible patriarchy” in the globalized virtual world might have displaced an older form of patriarchy. More specifically, in the current socio-cultural context, modern technology functions on the premise that “knowledge is power,” and technology nurtures a “mediated patriarchy” (Jahan, 2021). In other words, I do not claim that new technologies are to blame for new types of patriarchy; instead, new technology and patriarchy have a mediated relationship. In today’s virtual world, an older kind of patriarchy has been superseded by “mediated patriarchy” (Jahan, 2021).

This chapter neither questions the disadvantages of modern technology nor judges the actual effectiveness of these advantages. However, it delves deep into the utilisation of modern technology among the Left-behind wives and their men to identify how they place modern technology in their family system. The chapter also notes how technology works as a self-disciplining mechanism and understands the Left-behind wives’ standpoint with regard to modern

⁶⁷Kerala society is rooted in hidden sexual hypocrisy; though it is still not visible, it is embedded in all the norms and codes of daily life. Irrespective of men or women, all are aware of patriarchal dominance and are subjected to these stigmas of ‘hidden patriarchy’, no matter how long they raise their voices against it.

technology. By doing so, this chapter enhances the understanding of virtual technology as ‘surveillance technology’ in today’s virtual world.

Cayford and Pieters (2018) note that “surveillance technology is pervasive in our society today, and yet, evaluating whether surveillance technology increases security is a difficult task” (p. 88). According to Lyon (2010), “literally, surveillance means to “watch over,” an everyday practice in which human beings engage routinely, often unthinkingly. Parents watch over children; employers watch over workers; police watch over neighbourhoods; guards watch over prisoners, and so on. In most instances, however, surveillance has a more specific usage, referring to some focused and purposive attention to objects, data, or persons” (p.107). The study combines the words ‘surveillance’ and ‘technology’ and analyses how male subjects are nurturing spaces for the space-based patriarchy in this pseudo-egalitarian society. Surveillance is primarily for influence, authority, supremacy, and control, which are interlinked. The number of surveillance cameras and the amount of space under surveillance has grown massively.

This chapter does not imply that modern technology adversely affects the Left-behind wives but rather aims to bring out the nuanced aspects of the power struggles in the exercise of technology in their daily lives and reveal how technology works as a double-edged weapon in their routine.

4.2.1 Modern Technology: Monitoring and Self-Disciplining

Modern-day smartphones have come across as something tremendously pervasive in every region of the globe. The conception of virtual technology/modern technology is always coupled with the perception of monitoring and self-disciplining, directly and indirectly. According to Sheridan (2016), “the all-seeing eye of the system permeated every aspect of their life, and because of this, people became more aware of their own behaviour” (p.24). More precisely, virtual technology performs as a “non-sovereign power”, as Foucault (1978) proposed. Throughout this chapter, I propose the impacts of this monitoring, precisely the negative shade of the monitoring process. The advantage of this virtual technology has become an apparatus of control and autonomy. This research attempts to understand the impacts and considerations of this virtual surveillance technology. Besides, it is important to discuss how surveillance technology creates distress in the daily routines and the mental setup of the Left-behind wives in the absence of their husbands.

I also used personal experiences and field narrations to contextualise this study. I have noted many instances through the auto-ethnographic⁶⁸ approach and have personally observed the situation of many Gulf wives among extended family and relatives. In one particular instance, it was almost 7.30 pm when I noticed it while talking to my aunt (a Left-behind wife from the Malappuram district who lives in a separate home with her two children at her husband's native place; she is one of my key respondents). We were in the kitchen, preparing chapatti for dinner, while her children were upstairs doing school works. Meanwhile, a doorbell rang, and she looked at me uncomfortably, muttering something similar to "Who is coming here at this time?" In addition, she wore a scarf over her hair and used the scarf to cover her upper body. She then walked to open the door after identifying the visitor with a deep sigh by looking through the window mirror (window mirrors are common in every home in their neighbourhood. They help identify people standing outside without their knowledge). Her younger brother had come to deliver her daughter's stitched gown (her sister-in-law stitched the dress). In this case, the woman was concerned about the time and space in which her actions and movements might be judged. I observed a similar incident in their home when their husband was around, and I did not notice any concern in her expression, and she went straight to the door without peeking through the window mirror. When the husband is around and when he is not, the difference in emotional arousal is considerable, and the location plays a key role in triggering those emotions.

In the last chapter, I demonstrated the emotional responses of the Left-behind wives in various contexts with and without the presence of husbands (See chapter three). I could easily recall similar events from my childhood because my mother was also a Left-behind woman in her marital life. Hence, I realised that time and space play a significant impact on the mental setup of Left-behind wives, particularly when they are away from their spouses, and that they may play a negative role in their mental setup. Being a *gulfukarantebharya*⁶⁹, they are conditioned to certain disciplinary behaviours to survive in the existing patriarchal society. Disciplinary actions and

⁶⁸Auto-ethnography is a qualitative research tool in which the author uses self-reflection and personal experiences and connects the autobiographical accounts to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. According to Maréchal (2010), "autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing" (p. 43).

⁶⁹it is a Malayalam word that means wife of men who have migrated to the Gulf.

practices were used to train people to become more submissive and amenable to hegemonic control (Sheridan, 2016).

With the foregoing analysis, this part deals with the normalised disciplinary practices enforced on the Left-behind wives, particularly the women from the Muslim community. Modern technology operates as a self-disciplinary mechanism and, gradually, as an apparatus that fosters invisible patriarchy. I use the concept of “mediated patriarchy”, following the concept of mediated communication proposed by Anthony Giddens. This refers to husbands’ constant communication with their wives via both emotional and instrumental calls and messages. The messages and calls are meant for “micro-coordination” or “micro-management”, that is, to know the daily engagements of wives and the family and to know how they are doing at home. This micro-coordination leads to “nuanced instrumental micro-coordination” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) and develops into a form of “remote husbanding”, similar to the idea of “remote mothering” proposed by Rakow and Navarro (1993). The study found that migrants’ wives find their mobility more restricted when their husbands are no longer present to observe their behaviour (Hannaford, 2015). The disciplinary power tends to bring uniformity to the subjects who are inducted into the system. The subjects accept panoptic power norms, making them more docile and compliant with the power structures (Johns & Johns, 2000; Lips, 1991; Sheridan, 2016). I proposed the term “remote husbanding” to denote the relationship between migrant husbands and Left-behind Wives during their husband’s absence in their native place. I got several instances from the field to think, reflect and introduce the term remote husbanding. The following narrative helps to understand more about the process of ‘remote husbanding.’

Sabina, a 36-year-old mother of two who has completed higher secondary education, resides close to her husband's house in a separate residence. She explained:

My husband has many friends here, and I feel like My daughters and I are always under the observation of his friends. He had made it clear that I am supposed to inform him before I go anywhere. I used to seek his permission for every single thing. Once, the dam near our house started overflowing, and everybody went to see it. We also went with my co-sisters and their children. I did not tell him as I did not consider it significant enough to get permission for. The moment I reached there, I got a call from my husband. He rebuked me and instructed me to return home with the kids as soon as

possible. I knew that my husband got a call from his friend who was sitting near the dam. I had seen him while going there. If he was with us, he would not have had any problem with that. I feel as though I'm in a cage due to his absence.

The narrative depicts a process of 'remote husbanding' and enforcing a form of dominance over the wives and children; it may also be seen as an example of 'mediated patriarchy.' Mills (2003) highlights that discipline entails control concerning timekeeping, self-control, posture, bodily functions, and sublimation of immediate desires and emotions. Individuals are therefore subjected to a set of norms that are outside their own choice and behaviour, which are imbibed over some time. They aim at the disciplining of the self by the self.

I have heard from my aunt that she was subjected to several rumours, majorly that of alleged infidelity, when she used to return to their home in the late evenings from the neighbourhood. It is important to highlight the 'public gaze' that the Left-behind wives are subjected to on a regular basis. Somehow, their activities are exposed under the surveillance of this 'public gaze'. In the words of Sheridan (2016), "It also draws its inspiration from Bentham's idea of an all-seeing eye of God, that the perfect disciplinary apparatus would be able to see everything constantly with a singular gaze" (p.14). The idea of gaze is key to the panopticon, both inside and outside the watchtower. While the initial goal of panopticism was to be an explicit technique of control, the growth of technology and mankind's development into the digital era has completely reshaped the way this authority is being exercised (Sheridan, 2016).

Emphatically, it has been observed that there is an invisible omnipresence of patriarchal masculinity in society. As Beauvoir (1953) says, "Man learns his power" (p.100). In women's case, they are socialised to believe that going against their true selves by sublimating their active voices can achieve happiness and acceptance. They are not passive, mediocre, imminent beings but are made to embody certain characteristics imposed by the power structures (De Beauvoir & Parshley, 1953). Foucault suggests that the panoptic power works on the idea of self-surveillance. After a point, the psychological pressures of the power system led the individuals to believe that they are in control of their actions, but in reality, they are encouraged to cooperate with the system and are likely to correct themselves without any proactive outside influence (Hook, 2007; Sheridan, 2016).

A significant respondent who is thirty years old, a sociology graduate and a mother of two children is a Left-behind wife from Malappuram. Her husband left for Oman within a month of their wedding. He comes home once a year for a one-month vacation. She shared that she became a subject of gossip among the neighbours after speaking to her aunt's son when he visited her home after his first Gulf visit. A closer look at these narratives reveals a more nuanced picture of women's exclusionary experiences, specifically those faced by the Left-behind wives. As Simone de Beauvoir (1953) stated, "If the 'question of women' is so trivial, it is because masculine arrogance turned it into a 'quarrel'; when people quarrel, they no longer reason well" (p. 35). This chapter shows how women have always been treated as negligible, and their questions seem incidental; this easily draws an analogy with the experiences of the Left-behind wives. As Gulf wives, their voices do not draw much attention but, rather, are suppressed by society. The question of gender comes to the forefront not because this is a study about Gulf wives' cases. It is because the subjects are women, and women are the "other". Beauvoir (1956) takes to build on this argument: "One is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman" (p.273). Beauvoir shows the critical role of institutionalisation in creating women as the "other" and believes that women's inferiority in society is a result not of natural differences but differences in the upbringing of men and women. Male domination is not inherent or fated but conditioned at every stage of development. According to Beauvoir, women are not born subservient but are made to be so. They are not born passive but are socialised to adhere to the popular notion of being 'Women.'

4.2.2 Surveillance on Attire

After prolonged interaction with the respondents, I realised that modern technological mechanisms uprightly monitor the Left-behind wives and how it works as a self-disciplinary mechanism in the modernised patriarchal and virtual society. From the key respondents' responses, I recollected some instances regarding how technology works as a self-disciplinary mechanism. In many ways, ICTs turn the migrants' wives into docile bodies, open to their husbands' surveillance at any moment through virtual eyes, be they video cameras, computer screens or telephone lines. The ease of a husband's access to these tools means he can readily incorporate neighbours and family members into the disciplinary gaze (Hannaford, 2015). It can be seen that these women become more docile in front of the hegemonic control of the neighbourhood and the relatives around them. According to Omand (2015), people are monitoring the population's thoughts and actions, as well

as their physical appearance and attire. He also notes that mass surveillance refers to the widespread observation or monitoring of the entire population or a significant portion of it.

While coming to the point of selection or choice of dressing, the respondents have expressed concern about their attractive attire when attending events such as wedding receptions, birthday parties, housewarmings, and other joyful events. The majority of them overheard comments from neighbours and relatives about their clothing choices because they are Left-behind wives. In the absence of their spouses, locals are more interested in gossiping about these wives and interrupting them. From the field, I got to know that the neighbours and some relatives are more concerned about the attire and behaviour of the Left-behind wives, frequently making allegations against them and informing their migrant husbands about the claims, leading to some scepticism. Respondents also said that there is a gaze from relatives and neighbours while they dress up, which conveys ‘why these ladies appear so attractively in the absence of their husbands.’ Some respondents opined that they had been directly confronted with this question and that some of them had not been heard. Analysing the facts about those who have been directly dealt with these questions reveals intersecting factors.

In the context of Kerala, sartorial choices and styles are quite important. Devika (2005) notes that “dress was seen to signify not only a certain subjectivity but also a certain internality” (p.469). Clothing preferences and styles reflect an individual’s style perception, a manifestation of norms or beliefs, and a reflection of self; because they are profoundly embedded in one’s disposition or hidden inside one’s consciousness, one’s clothing is developed on the basis of artistic, social, or ethical standards (Kwon, 2007). Also, Devika (2005) notes that “covering the body was stressed as equally important for both men and women; it seemed to have special importance for women” (p.470). Some of the respondents began using *Purdah*⁷⁰ as a result of

⁷⁰ An epitome of modesty. *Purdah* also spelt *Purdhah*, known in Hindi as *parda* (“screen” or “veil”), is a practice that was inaugurated by Muslims and later adopted by various Hindus, especially in India, which involves the seclusion of women from public observations by means of concealing body with clothes (including the veil). The practice of *Purdah* is said to have originated in Persian culture and to have been acquired by Muslims during the Arab conquest of what is now Iraq in the 7th century AD. During India’s British hegemony, *purdah* observance was strictly adhered to and widespread among the highly conscious Muslim minority. For more see Osella and Osella (2007).

external pressures and also to avoid unwanted confrontations. On the other hand, some respondents claimed that they prefer to wear *Purdah* on all occasions because it is their personal choice.

Women attempt to escape the shackles of sexual objectification by covering themselves in *purdah*, within which she remains free of concern regarding their body or appearance, shedding themselves of the worries of the intensive and judgements stares and interrogation, along with the restrictions imposed by means of the moralistic codes associated with fashion. *Purdah* relieves women of their concern about what she is wearing underneath, thus providing a liberating experience. The *Purdah* is treated as a “decent dress”, and it is a modern veiling style connected with pan-Islamic inclinations that expose only the hands, feet, and face (Osella & Osella, 2007). Osella and Osella (2007) stated that it is frequently asserted that Muslims in South India did not practise *purdah* even fifteen years ago. Muslim women, like their Hindu counterparts, even wore their saris with tight, midriff-baring short-sleeved tops. Non-Muslims have harshly opposed the adoption of *purdah* since the 1980s, calling it an undesirable novelty brought about by Arab influence through the Gulf and a foreign, not local, habit.

Although, until the 1960s, white *purdah* clothing was in vogue, many aged ladies can still be seen wearing the traditional Indian burqa (Jeffery 1979; Osella & Osella, 2007). Although a number of Muslim girls and ladies do not cover their faces at present, the practice has grown in popularity (Lindberg, 2009). The hijab or niqab⁷¹ was only popular among the upper class, well-educated Muslim women who had a lot of freedom in choosing their clothing (Hashim, 2015). Yet, there have been numerous intense debates about the hijab and niqab systems. Hashim (2015) argued that;

Historically, feminists have seen veiling as the ultimate symbol, if not tool, of gender oppression in Islamic cultures; yet many Islamic women not only participate voluntarily in the practice but also claim it a mark of resistance, agency, and cultural membership. (p.165).

⁷¹ Niqab is a face veil that does not cover the eyes. The terms niqab and burqa are sometimes misinterpreted; a niqab covers the face but leaves the eyes open, but a burqa covers the complete body from top to bottom, with only a mesh screen allowing the wearer to see in front of her. Face veiling is not a necessity in Islam, according to the majority of Muslim scholars and Islamic schools of thought; but, a minority of Muslim scholars, particularly among the Sunni Salafi and Wahhabism movements, say that women must cover their faces in public. The niqab is worn by Muslim women in locations where they may encounter non-mahram (unrelated) men.

Besides a bodily veil, *purdah* becomes a ‘way of thinking’ (Kalia, 2019). In contemporary days, Muslim women in northern Kerala believed *Purdah* to be a comfortable piece of attire. As a result, the majority of women wear the *Purdah* while shopping, visiting the hospital, and in other emergency situations. It makes them feel more comfortable when it comes to maintaining their modesty. *Purdah* acts as a cover. Cover in the sense that it aids in hiding the deformities or insecurities of one’s body, adding to its functionality and thus enabling social engagement. Shilujas (2022) rightly points out that the *Purdah* is no longer just clothing; it is also an ornament, a shield, a protector, a disguise, a sign, and a free-floating signifier. *Purdah* both forbids and authorises; it covers both that which can be revealed and that which is to be concealed.

The practice of wearing a *Purdah* is influenced by a woman’s location, community, class, religion, age, educational background, and current workplace situation (Paul, 2020). Despite the *purdah* being a manifestation of patriarchy, certain instances suggest the acceptance of the subject in preferring to wear the same; this points out the enabling aspect of the *purdah*, paralleling it with power. It is to be noted that such fluidity in preferences cannot be generalised. Shilujas (2022) notes, “The dressing pattern could be due to persuasion from others, but over time, it becomes self-persuasive to the recipient of persuasion (p.100). College students also prefer to wear *Purdah* to class in a variety of styles and colours. *Purdah*’s connotation has evolved over time and now also has the potential to be a symbol of the uprising (Kalia, 2019). *Purdah* has been fashionable in numerous forms in this period. However, some women keep wearing the *Purdah* to appear modest in their attire, and others do so owing to the force or influence of others, particularly partners or parents. The problem arises when there is a compulsion from a husband or any other external force. Coercion, or the lack thereof, plays a role in the acceptance of a woman in wearing *purdah* in correspondence with identity formation and self-presentation. Tied closely to the community, family and kinship codes, *purdah* at times act as an enabling mechanism in identifying with and being accepted by the community. While in some cases, the veil signifies a means of ‘being and becoming religious.’ (Shilujas, 2022, p.99)

The entry of the hijab or niqab into Kerala was facilitated by the migration to Gulf countries (Hashim, 2015). The migration process enabled women’s mobility with limitations. The limitations include their dressing styles and patterns that they must dress according to their husband’s wishes, which frequently entails concealing the entire body, including the face while

going outside (Hashim, 2015; Lindberg, 2009). The purdah has transcended the religious requirements to enter the realm of the cultural, thereby marking its presence integral in the day-to-day life of certain groups of people. The obligation to wear purdah has evolved from passive acceptance to active internalisation by means of adding personalised meanings to the same.

The fact is that society perceives purdah as a way to cover the physical body from prying eyes and that it leads women to believe that they are sexual objects and should not engage in any form of sexual enticement with men (Kalia, 2019). Few of them wear the niqab along with *Purdah* whenever they go outside, depending on their own choice or their husband's command. At the same time, those who wear *Purdah* due to their husband's compulsion can wear whatever they wish to wear inside *Purdah*, including Kurtis and sarees. Many respondents have done this when attending any festive gatherings, and they remove the *Purdah* as they enter the function, keep it safe in their handbag, and then re-wear it when they leave.

Many of the key respondents' responses showed it was a normal practice or strategy. At weddings and other festive occasions, I witnessed my aunts, cousins and neighbours switching from *Purdah* to other colourful Salwars or sarees when I was a teenager. Modern studies tune in to the liberatory attributes of purdah, speaking of its nuanced aspects. But this doesn't necessarily mean turning a blind eye to the double-edged nature of the purdah. I here serve the purpose of neither neglecting the liberatory aspects nor exaggerating the suppressive element of the purdah. One's self cannot be reduced to a singular dimension, for it may be multiple intersecting factors and context.

One of the key respondents, named Jumaila (thirty-four years old, completed secondary school and has three kids), stays in a separate house near her in-laws' home. Her husband had migrated to Saudi Arabia as a construction worker. He often visits home for two months of vacation. In her own words:

I mostly wear a Purdha wherever I go, like hospitals, banks, and other places. But when I go for weddings, I wear party wear inside the Purdah. I remove the Purdah when I reach the venue and keep it safe in my handbag. After the function, I wear it again while leaving.

Another key informant, Shahana (thirty-seven years old, completed secondary school, and mother of two children), recounted similar experiences, saying:

I feel more comfortable in a Purdah. It is only for weddings and other festive occasions that I dress up in sarees or party wears. I wear salwar sets or sarees inside the Purdah when I leave my house for a function and then remove the Purdah once I reach the destination. I used to get targeted due to the costume change. People have asked me, 'Why am I so dressed up when my husband isn't here to see me?'. People used to tell me that I live extravagantly, spending my husband's hard-earned money on useless things like clothing. I find such remarks depressing.

From the key respondents' extensive interactions, I noticed that the outfit change had become a source of contention among their families. Many of the relatives and neighbours criticise the Left-behind wives, claiming that these wives were simply wasting their husbands' money and having some fun in the absence of their husbands. During these in-depth interviews with key respondents, they have spoken about the 'gaze' and control from relatives and neighbours. Respondents express their dissatisfaction with their neighbours' and relatives' unfair behaviour. In addition, they claim that both neighbours and relatives hamper their daily routine.

In addition, their neighbours or relatives do not only dictate the Left-behind wives' outfits, but their husbands also often give instructions on how to dress. Wives are obliged to share their dressed-up photographs with their husbands via Whatsapp before going to any function. The electronic gaze of the migrant husband can be intensely disciplinary, in disproportion to the husband's physical gaze when he is at home (Hannaford, 2015). They are, in fact, asked to send the images once they have dressed up. However, it has a two-fold effect.

Mrs Ayishabi (thirty years old, completed higher secondary education, and has two children) is one of the key respondents who live separately near her parents' home in the Kozhikode district. Her husband is an engineer who visits every six months for a one-month vacation. In regards to her and their children, he is extremely strict. According to her,

I used to send a lot of photos to my husband on WhatsApp. I take photos and send it to him whenever my kids and I dress up for an event or a festivity. I enjoyed it a lot at

first, thinking that he will get happy seeing us all dressed up and smiling. However, I eventually realised my blunder. My husband scolds me if I do not wear my hijab correctly. He asks me to change my clothes if he finds it too tight. He forbids me from wearing jeans and leggings. I found it all to be really annoying.

Another key informant, Mrs Shahana, says;

I usually go for weddings and other events with my neighbours or relatives. There have been instances where I was all dressed up and ready to leave, only to have my husband inform me that my clothes were either too bright or too tight, forcing me to return home and change. Due to this, even my neighbours get late. They know that my husband is very strict in such matters. I get really upset with his behaviour. There are times when I tell him that I forgot to snap pictures before going. Sometimes, I do not inform him about the functions. I know for sure that he will get to know if I attend one and ask for images when I get back. Smartphones did this to be. Now, I can't even wear what I please!

From these narratives, we can see how the power of technology has badly impacted the Left-behind wives. Some husbands who firmly follow patriarchal norms and strive to regulate their wives' mobility in different ways indicate the presence of invisible patriarchy. There are power dynamics at work in reality. It exists in various shapes and sizes, and it can be found in family relationships, institutions, or government bureaucracy. (Mills, 2003). More precisely, power relations have different forms. The ways and forms in which they operate can also create newer power relations.

This section addressed the forms of power involved in the surveillance of the Left-behind wives' attire among families and the power relations between the migrant husbands and Left-behind wives. Some Left-behind wives are obligated to dress according to their husband's wishes, and they exist as voiceless, docile, and submissive. Furthermore, the power symbol is always associated with masculinity. A Foucauldian study focuses on how power is distributed across society in various types of relationships, events, and activities; focusing on contextual aspects investigates how power operates (Mills, 2003).

4.3 An Ontological Inquiry into the Power Relations between Migrant Husbands and Left-behind wives

There is a power relationship between each relationship. Interpersonal connections are typically influenced by power dynamics. According to Mills (2003):

The relations between parents and children, employers and employees- in short, all relations between people are power relations. In each interaction, power is negotiated, and one's position in a hierarchy is established, however flexible, changing and ill-defined that hierarchy is. (p.49)

This means that the members, knowingly or unknowingly, develop a power relationship between them in each interaction. Nowadays, technology plays a decisive role in the power relations between the Left-behind wives and their migrant husbands. Power, as Foucault (1982) suggests, establishes relationships between partners. These power relations are different from the relationships of communication that use certain symbols or mediums. This very communication, both the production and circulation of it, has consequences in the realm of power. Power relations have a unique nature, even if they do not pass through a communication system. Mills (2003) argued that “power is something which is performed, something more like a strategy than a possession” (p.35). Indeed, power is a strategy that is performative. While defining power relations, Foucault observes that power relations do not act directly on others, but they act on their actions- actions that occur in the present or ones that may happen in the future (Foucault, 1982). Moreover, Foucault is keenly aware of institutions' role in shaping individuals, although he does not wish to see the relations between institutions and individuals as being one only of oppression and constraint (Mills, 2003). According to Vagle (2016):

Foucault understood and described both the productivity of power (the fact that power relationships are necessary to the modern society) and subjectivity through power relations (the impact of these power relationships is not limited to repression, but includes also the intent to teach, to shape conduct, and to install and enforce identities, and can result in all of the above). Surveillance can take many forms, but irrespective of how extraordinary or common a particular manifestation may be, the management of a power relationship is at its core. Opening our eyes to these implications can only help in our comprehension of surveillance in all its forms and effects. (p.1)

As living beings in a patriarchal society, women are powerless as compared to men. Patriarchy has an undeniable connection to the subordination of women. The supremacy of power is always equated to men in society. Socio-cultural factors are enabling supremacy over women. From my perspective, today's women have become easy prey to this mainstreaming and male gaze through various cultural institutions. The frequency of communication between couples has increased, which helps them gradually develop virtual patriarchy in their transnational relationships with their wives. The ease of telecommunication makes these women more vulnerable to their husbands' direct control and surveillance (Hannaford, 2015). The field data underpin the arguments regarding the "patriarchy in the absence of men"⁷².

Thus, in the following section, I roughly examine the important issues concerning gender and technological surveillance. Here, I focus on the instances regarding power relations between the husband and wife and how modern technology works.

4. 3.1. Gender and Technological Surveillance

The gender and technological surveillance approach is grounded within two subheadings: women and technological surveillance in public space/affairs and private space/affairs. These two areas overlap and blend. Therefore, the current section focuses on power, precisely how unequal power relations are reproduced and reinforced by technological means. Koskela (2000) uses the phrase masculinisation of spaces wherein women are heavily scrutinised in male-dominated spaces without being given any protection against harassment or assault. The installation of cameras in devices like cell phones has led to uninvited scrutiny and objectification of women.

Monahan (2009) highlights that impartial disembodied control has become the rulebook with which the current age surveillance system works. It artificially abstracts individuals, identities and conversations from social contexts in such a way that affects gender and other social inequalities. Questioning and interrogating such systems helps one challenge the so-called passiveness of such technologies and question the power relations to which they give rise to. Modern surveillance systems are always controlling the body, specifically the disembodied bodies.

⁷²Though the men are physically absent, his control will always be there for his wife. His possessive mentality always put a restriction on her personal space and decisions. Their patriarchal attitude towards their wife will be more powerful and rigid in their absence than their presence.

Space does not become a complication to modern surveillance, and the power relations embedded within surveillance affect space.

Furthermore, I assert that questions on surveillance are always related to gender. Women are the primary concern in the discourse of gender. Therefore, I explicate the impact of modern technology and modern surveillance in women's public and private spaces/spheres, specifically by looking at the Left-behind wives and the gender implications of modern surveillance technologies. I also attempt to analyse the emotions and feelings this surveillance creates among them.

4.3.1.1. Women and Technological Surveillance in Public Sphere

Here, I focus on the power relations between husband and wife, mainly focusing on the power relation that persists due to the impact of technology and public space interactions. According to Foucault (1982):

Power relations are rooted in the system of social networks. This is not to say, however that there is a primary and fundamental principle of power which dominates society down to the smallest detail; but, taking as point of the departure the possibility of action upon the action of others is (which is coextensive with every social relationship), multiple forms of individual disparity, of objectives, of the given of application power over ourselves or others, of in varying degrees, partial or universal institutionalisation, of more or less deliberate organisation, one can define different forms of power. (p.793)

Every relationship contains power dynamics, and power struggles are common in all relationships. Each power basis is thought to be linked to a variety of influence methods and practices, each of which has its own set of impacts on the targets of influence (Simpson, Farrell, Oriña, & Rothman, 2015).

Mrs Rubeena, a crucial respondent from Calicut who is 31 years old, has two children and a 12th-grade education. After six months of marriage, her husband left for Kuwait, and he visits the family once a year for a month's leave. While striking up an in-depth conversation with her, I noticed that she frequently keeps her eye on her in-laws; her body language displayed a mixture of obedience and apprehension about them. She shared her experience regarding the technological surveillance of her husband from the public space as follows:

My husband contacted me when I was attending our daughter's annual day programme at her school and inquired whether the event was over. Since it was the second programme and done by that time, I answered in the affirmative. Then, he asked if I could return home. I promised to return home shortly. Despite his cordial tone, I could tell that he was giving me an order. Even though I enjoyed watching those cultural programmes, I was unable to stay for long as my husband disapproved of it.

This narrative is helpful in exploring how ‘hegemonic masculinity’ works in a virtual society. Hegemonic masculinity has been a prominent concept in discussions concerning men, gender, and social hierarchy. This hegemonic masculinity is an important link between the fields of men’s studies, popular anxieties about men and boys, feminist accounts of patriarchy, and sociological models of gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is a contested concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out that it is different from other forms, especially subordinated masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity is normative, it is not a normal masculine representation in a statistical sense; only a few men enact it. It has become the ideal representation of how a man should behave. All men are required to act according to hegemonic masculinity, paving the way for ideologically legitimising women’s global subordination by men.

Moreover, many key respondents answered in a similar manner, describing analogous instances of domination by their husbands while going to wedding receptions and other engagements. The respondents said that before leaving the house, their husbands would give them instructions over the phone on how to behave, whom to talk to, what to talk about, and so on. Husbands call their wives to find out if they are ‘safely home from wherever she goes and whether everything is all right’. Wives obtain husbands’ approval for everything, and the husbands control them through the calls and messages that Vestby (1996) rightly terms ‘positive control’. ‘Positive control’ indicates the elements of care and control, which are closely interrelated.

Mrs Safwana is thirty years old, has completed high school, has one child and lives with her in-laws. The following are some of the experiences she shared with me:

Since my husband is not here, I accompany my in-laws wherever they go. But whenever I go with my in-laws, my husband will call me and give me a long list of instructions

on my supposed code of conduct. I am not even allowed to give a simple 'Hi' to others in the presence of my in-laws.

Mrs Safwana shared the following in another instance:

Before going to any wedding reception, he (my husband) would have certain instructions for me to follow: 'Do not spend too much time there, try to come after having food and do not go for further rituals. There is no need to interact with everyone present, and yeah, I am not supposed to pose for any photographs either' He usually hung up the phone by reminding me that I would have to give him a missed call after reaching home.

The views expressed above by one of the key respondents named Safwana constituted the typical conversational exchange most of the respondents had with their husbands. If we critically analyse such instances in Foucault's words, a relationship of violence closes doors on all possibilities when it acts on a body/thing, bends it, breaks it on the wheel, and destroys it. For the articulation of a power relationship, it is important that the 'other'—who exercises power—is recognised thoroughly and maintained as a person who acts; moreover, in the face of such a power relationship, a variety of responses, reactions, results and possible inventions open up (Foucault, 1982).

4.3.1.2. Women and Technological Surveillance in Private Sphere

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault examines how the discipline has been forwarded as self-regulation and has permeated modern societies encouraged by various institutions. His work on disciplinary regimes is vital as it does not just see regimes as oppressive but also analyses how regimes exercise power using different mechanisms and techniques (Mills, 2003). Modern technology is a new form of social institution, and it has changed the dynamics and dimensions of social life. Technology has erased social choices or has made them embedded so profoundly in technical structures that they have become invisible. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard rightly refers to *phenomenotechnique*⁷³ as something that makes technology one of the most powerful institutions (Pinch, 2008).

⁷³ This term is used in this way by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) in *Laboratory Life*

Here I attempt to place the role of modern technology in determining the spaces for private affairs produced in the context of modern patriarchal society. Another key informant Shajitha, who is 30 years old, has completed higher secondary education, has two kids and stays in a separate home just near her husband's home; she went on to learn tailoring after completing a higher secondary course. Her husband often comes for a three-month-leave in every two years; she says:

We have successfully made up an image of a happy couple in front of our family. We live like a newlywed couple; when he comes for a vacation. We go to the beach and visit relatives. We enjoy going on long drives and cooking his favourite dishes together, mostly non-vegetarian items. Our house will be alive when he is there. Yet....

She abruptly stopped talking and sobbed for a long time. She resumed talking with an innocent face after wiping away her tears.

When he was in Abu Dhabi, he would call me on the phone or on the landline at random and make a video call using BOTIM. Sometimes he calls his mother to know my whereabouts. I am not sure whether you understand the gravity of this issue. I find it disappointing when he calls his mother to check on me, his mother might think that we are not on good terms, and that's why he is calling her. I'm conscious of his intense possessiveness towards me. I didn't find it a problem when he was here. The problem started after he left home. He forbids me from going to the beach with my family or his family. He continually tells me that we have been there before, and nothing has changed when I plead for his consent.

In a similar case, another key respondent, Mrs Muneera, who formerly worked as a private school teacher, was forced to leave her job after marriage. She stays with her in-laws and has one child. She describes her experience as follows:

My husband is not comfortable staying away from me. He is highly suspicious of my conduct and doesn't like it when I freely interact with other people. He gets angry if my phone is engaged when he calls. He usually calls me to confirm where I am. I am a person who likes to spend time outside. I take my kids out on weekends. When he calls and inquires where I am, I would tell him that I am at any rifts between us. Nowadays, he has started to test me by asking to speak with my kid and mother-in-law. Then I

would bellow out my son's name, hoping to convince him that we are home. The situation gets dangerous when it's a video call.

Obviously, the Left-behind wives find themselves in a situation of hardships due to modern technology, specifically smartphones. Mobile phones and landlines are not the only tools that control these women. Voice-over-internet technology, instant messenger software, and the increased ease of electronic money transfer further enhance an absent husband's ability to circumscribe his wife's independence (Hannaford, 2015). Her body and her behaviour are being disciplined and controlled by this electronic gaze. Of course, the gaze is a matter of power. Another respondent named Souda is forty-one years old, has completed schooling till ninth class, and has three kids who stay in a separate home near her husband's elder brother's home. She got married at the age of fifteen, and after a month of marriage, her spouse moved to Saudi Arabia. Every two years, her spouse comes home for a two-month vacation. She said that she had no financial independence, explaining:

WhatsApp is a double-edged sword. Even though I love video-calling him, I often get irritated by his demands. He wants me to send the bills of each and every expense at home. Due to this, I am supposed to collect and keep all the bills. This gets difficult at times because they usually misplace them. My husband and I have quarrelled over this matter many times. Sometimes it gets escalated into big fights. I would not have to take so much trouble sending him the bills If I didn't have a smartphone. With WhatsApp, it has started becoming a burden. Of course, the smartphone is great for sending photos and doing video calls.

The use of technology in all aspects of life can occasionally put people's lives in danger and increase risks (Younes & Samer, 2015). Here, I have noticed that the pervasive surveillance nature of modern technology creates chaos in marital life. Many Left-Behind wives find it irksome since their husbands insist on sending every expense detail, which makes them feel like a swindler. In addition, installing CCTV in their house worsens the already awful situation, and I observed that 51 households (41%) in the field installed CCTV for security purposes, including upper-middle-class and middle-class families.

Mrs Abita, another respondent who is thirty-three years old, failed her tenth grade and is a mother of three, lives separately in a newly built two-storied home. Before departing for Kuwait two months ago, her husband set up the installation of CCTV both inside and outside the house. She explained her personal experiences with CCTV at home, “*Now we are literally in jail (laughing), and we feel like culprits. The surveillance cameras are recording our entire home 24 x7. I cannot go even to my neighbours’ home for a casual visit.*” Another key informant named Jasina, thirty-four years old, mother of two children, and has completed her 10th-grade schooling, explained:

My co-sister, mother-in-law, and I live together. Our husbands are in the Gulf. We have kept a CCTV camera in our house due to safety concerns. There are a few cameras outside our house, and one is in the dining hall. Our husbands can access the CCTV footage. They can see what is going on in our house from there. (When I went to their house, the women told me that their husbands might have seen me.) when there were no men in the house, we used to roam around freely without our headscarves. However, the CCTV camera makes us feel that there are men in our house, as they can see us. Now, we are hesitant to walk around the house without wearing a headscarf. It is against our beliefs to let another man see us without the headscarf. We are always conscious of the fact that they are watching us. If we did not have a CCTV camera, we would have had more freedom around the house. Even when we are outside the house, washing clothes, we have to be very careful about what we are wearing. If it was just my husband, I would have been fine with it. But my husband’s brother may also see the footage. It is getting difficult these days. This affects me and my co-sister equally.

Surveillance cameras (Closed-Circuit Television or CCTV) are increasingly being used to monitor public and private spaces throughout the world. The meanings of space, time, and interactions have changed as a result of the use of CCTV and other modern technology. This video/camera surveillance causes marital strife in some way as well. People being recorded by a CCTV camera are often unaware that they are being watched or looked at. Sara Mills (2003) claims that Foucault sees power as productive and, at the same time, as something that brings about forms of behaviour and events rather than merely curtailing freedom and constraining individuals. The

Benthamite prison's panoptic structure was a circular atrium with cells facing inwards along the perimeter, with a single watchtower in the middle from where the watchman could observe without being observed. In this setup, the prisoners could be watched at all times without them knowing whether or not there was someone in the watchtower observing them. As subjects of this gaze, they would modify their behaviour and be less likely to instigate trouble (Sheridan, 2016); to put it differently, this gaze is a matter of power.

Some participants said that their spouses call them all the time (respondents joke that their husbands do not seem to have any other jobs there!) and enquire about everything going on at home. Regarding this, Mrs Shaharbanu, a twenty-nine-year-old mother of one kid who was unable to complete her graduation, shared:

Even though I would love to talk to my husband, sometimes it gets on my nerves when he keeps on calling continuously. He isn't mindful of my convenience. I can't even do the namaaz peacefully due to this. He usually gets angry if I delay in attending his calls.

Another respondent, Mrs Thahira, thirty-six years old, with 9th-grade qualification, has three children and has been staying separately in their newly built home. Every two years, her migrant spouse returns for a forty-day leave. She explains:

My husband keeps calling me even while I am travelling. I don't feel comfortable talking to him while I travel. He does not care where I am. I think that he is doing it purposefully so that I won't be able to talk with other men.

The expansion and advancement of technology, especially mobile phones, tablets, and CCTV, force the Left-behind wives to tell the actuality of their daily routine. Foucault (1982) stated that there is no direct conflict between power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom vanishes whenever power is exercised), but rather a far more complex interplay.

I also got to know that the Left-behind wives feel conscience-stricken about their living conditions, and many of them do not want their husbands working away from them for a long period of time. Moreover, some of the respondents had aspirations regarding their partners and their occupation before the marriage itself. They gave preferences to those who were staying with the family. They do not want a partner who is working away from them. Regrettably, some of them got partners who work abroad; obviously, it was granted against their wishes. Nevertheless, I heard

from some of the respondents that they are entrusting everything in the hands of destiny. It is perhaps either because of their family's socio-economic background or because of their 'agential status' in their family, in sociological terms. In that sense, I can conclude that these Left-behind wives do not get the chance to choose their life\marriage partners. This fact cannot be generalized to a wider society. The choice rendered to the women in the selection of their respective mate is dependent on various intersecting factors like class, sect, social standing, and geographical location.

It can be seen that the older members of the family are always deciding on behalf of those women. Moreover, there exists a gender difference in the preference of marriage partners. According to Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica and Simonson (2006), as per social structure theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999) and the social role theory (Eagly, 1987), gender variations in mate selection criteria are derived from variances in men's and women's social positions and roles. As a result, qualifying criteria may prefer those who suit their gender stereotype. I still remember one specific preference of my friend Shareena regarding the choice of her marriage partner. When she was in high school, she would often tell me that she wanted a partner who was not working abroad and that his job should be in the circumferential place where they stayed. That was the sole condition she put forward to her parents. She did not even bother about his educational qualification, employment status, economic setup, family setup, and all other typical concerns when she went ahead with the marriage proposal. However, many of us joked and insulted her decision during that time because most of us prioritised our partners' socio-economic status foremost. In addition, she frequently stated that her mother is a Left-behind wife, and she is aware of her mother's sufferings and problems in her father's absence.

Women in many contexts are expected to share every detail of their life with their respective partners. Going to the extent of even seeking permission to do certain things which are denied to them. Over time they start accepting this denial and, later on, internalize these norms that are expected of them. Here, it is crucial to discern the centrality of coercion/ persuasion for the existence of the hegemony of men and gender hierarchy throughout one's life. Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) make the point that hegemonic masculinity is not a commonality in men. It works its way into men's lives by forming complex exemplars of masculinity; symbols backed up by cultural authority, and in reality, most men and boys cannot fully live up to them. According to

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), “Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (p.832). The most negative aspect of the patriarchal norms of masculinity is men’s tendency to compete with each other constantly. Everything that a man does is governed by the compulsive need to be seen as better than other men or people in general (Leonard Fradet, 2018).

4.3.2. Surveillance in the Usage of Mobile Phones

Humans are social beings, and nowadays, their relationships are dominated by modern technology, which reduces distance. However, it has certain negative consequences in terms of social and family relationships. The use of modern technology is seen as a requirement for life and a marker of cultural awareness of the community. It has pervaded many aspects of life, demonstrating that it improves the quality of life while also increasing communication and social ties (Younes & Samer, 2015). According to Rosen (2004), to be able to talk to anyone, at any time, without the mediation of a human messenger and the messenger’s attendant delays is a thoroughly modern triumph of human engineering. A substantial body of literature suggests that phones shorten social time and space (Geser, 2004; Green, 2007). It is unimaginable to explore how new advanced technology has impacted our lives and how it will impact us in the future. Android mobile phones have become a common gadget for communication purposes. Telecommunication and telephones are seen as heralds of modernity and are connected with the idea of increasing speeds and decreasing distances. Mobile phones, in particular, are known for their ability to delimit communication spatially (Katz, 2011). This is why mobile phones have become an icon of globalisation, worldwide communication and borderless connections (Hahn & Kibora, 2008). The ease of online interaction does not guarantee favourable outcomes for all those who use it, of course, and the list of unintended, undesirable consequences from cellphone use continues to grow.

According to sociologist Chantal de Gournay, parents use technology like cell phones to check on children instead of teaching them appropriate behaviour. This is instigated due to a lack of trust in any social institutions other than family and arises from paranoia regarding the community (Rosen, 2004). Migrant husbands give cell phones to their wives to talk with them and monitor them. Hannaford (2015) points out that communication technology is not a simple instrument to bring wives closer to absent husbands. Christensen (2009) notes that mobile phones

are employed to exercise micro-coordination, remote parenting and parental supervision, affective discussions, have conversations with other family members, or simply seek a personal relationship with those who are away. I have also found that smartphones are used for expressive conversations, sharing experiences, and seeking personal contact with those absent through husbanded-control and ‘remote husbanding’. Instead, the constant threat of surveillance that such technology enables puts a great deal of stress on these transnational couples. Cell phones or other modern technological gadgets are not the only culprits here; the way people are using modern technology is a serious concern as well. Even recharging plans for mobile phones have become a significant aspect to note in this modern era. Questions such as who pays for data and phone calls and how the data and phone calls are recharged are equally important.

The following table (4.4) displays the persons who recharge the Left-behind wives’ mobile phones while their husbands are away.

Table 4.4- The Person who is Recharging the Left-behind wives’ Mobile phone

Recharger	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Brother-in-law	8	6
Brother	8	6
Children	4	3
Father	3	2
Father-in-law	3	2
Husband	42	34
Neighbour	2	2
Respondents	23	19
Husband and respondents	31	25
Grand Total	124	100

This table (Table 4.4) describes that 42 respondents’ mobile phones (34%) are always recharged by their husbands from the Gulf. Twenty-three respondents (19%) continuously recharge their

phones themselves through third-party recharging applications⁷⁴. Thirty-one respondents (25%) recharge the phone themselves and often depend on their husbands when there is a poor network connection and a low balance in their bank account. The remaining 21% of the respondents depend on their brother-in-law, brother, father, father-in-law, neighbour, and children to recharge mobile phones. In-depth interviews with the respondents revealed that, for security concerns, they prefer not to recharge from outside shops except in case of an emergency, and they have described a few instances of this (see Mrs Sakeena's narrative).

From the field, I got many instances regarding how mobile phones are being used and how they have become surveillance technology. Mrs Sakeena, who is thirty-seven years old with 8th-class qualification, and has two kids, stay in a separate home near her sister's home. She has not stayed for a long time with her in-laws. After two months of their marriage, she and her husband moved to where her sister stayed. They live in a rented home now and are in the process of building a new house. Sakeena's spouse holds an MBA from Chennai and works as a supervisor in a construction firm. According to Sakeena, her husband is a harsh and stringent person when it comes to the usage of her mobile phone. She says:

Even though I have a smartphone, I am not entitled to use it as I wish. My husband disapproves of me spending much time on the phone. He does my mobile recharge, as he is not comfortable with the shopkeeper getting my contact number. Some time back, an incident happened in our locality. A girl befriended a shopkeeper who used to recharge her phone and eloped with him. It came around as a shock to all of us. Such incidents pile up, creating barriers for people like me. I don't know what to say; maybe, he doesn't trust me enough.

Not surprisingly, some husbands explicitly show domination, although not physically, through technology. They are very strict with their wives, and they insist on rigorous restrictions for their wives while using mobile phones. In Sakeena's case, her husband is a post-graduate, which indicates that education has no impact on his attitudes and behaviours toward his wife. I understood that the education and exposure that a man gets from studying outside does not help him disrupt

⁷⁴Recharging a phone can be done in multiple ways, including that using the service provider's online applications. In the field, respondents primarily recharge their phones using third-party applications such as Google Pay, Phonepe, and Paytm.

patriarchal norms. One of the respondents, named Haseena, who is thirty-three years old, a mom of two children, has completed secondary education and has been staying in a separate house at her husband's native place in Malappuram. She shares

I am not against my husband knowing the happenings in our house through WhatsApp and other means. What concerns me is his habit of controlling us through cell phones. We are supposed to inform him about each and everything that happens in the home. But there are times, especially during the festivities, when I am not able to text him due to my hectic schedule. He often refuses to let us explain the matter if we don't inform him beforehand. I believe that WhatsApp and other instant messaging apps (key respondents listed a few names of instant messaging apps) are causing a rift between us. During such times, we do not speak to each other for two or three days, sometimes even weeks.

The field data also shows that, instead of creating a shared space and time between the partners, the easy availability of new communication technology led to friction and marital instability in their partnership. One of the respondents, named Sameera, is thirty-five years old. She has completed SSLC and has not pursued additional formal schooling. She explained:

My husband determines when I should use the Internet on my mobile phone. I cannot use WhatsApp and Facebook, depending on my time and mood. As everyone is aware, WhatsApp has a privacy feature called "last seen." There are three options: "everyone," "contacts," and "nobody." I am sure that no one will see my WhatsApp "last seen" if I choose nobody. Unfortunately, if I choose 'nobody' in my WhatsApp setting, my husband will get angry and pick a fight with me. He often argues that I am sending messages to other people without letting them know about it. For him, I am obliged to keep my WhatsApp privacy settings of last seen as 'my contacts'. I find his behaviour uncalled for.

Those who are not using social media platforms and other instant messaging applications of their choice are not the same as those who cannot use them due to their partners' restrictions. The restriction on its use cuts down the level of accessibility in this society. We all know that our social media accounts and other instant messaging apps are becoming extensions of ourselves, like virtual organs within our bodies. The respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with their

situation because they could not use their phones as they wished and were somehow monitored and controlled by their partners.

The table below (Table 4.5) gives the details regarding the display of the respondents' real photographs as profile pictures on their WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook accounts.

Table 4.5- Freedom of Keeping respondents' Photos as Profile Pictures in social media

Freedom of Keeping respondents' Photos as Profile Pictures on social media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Respondents personally do not like	17	14
No freedom of choice	64	52
Respondents have choice	43	35
Grand Total	124	100

The above table describes that 64 respondents (52%) do not have the freedom to keep their own photos on a social media account, and 43 respondents (35%) keep their photos on social media profiles. These 43 respondents have no issues with their husbands while keeping or not keeping their photos public, and they can do it according to their preferences. Seventeen respondents (14%) personally do not like to put their photo as their profile picture. It is significant to note that most respondents do not have a choice to keep their photographs on social media without their husband's consent, and it explicitly shows the power of patriarchy. Also, I note that the usage of cell phones by Left-behind wives is subject to their husbands and their family's supervision. Lubna, a graduate and mother of two, who is 31 years old, one of the important respondents, shared:

I am not allowed to keep my photo as my display picture in WhatsApp. My usual profile photo includes my husband, kids and images of landscapes. He is very strict about these things. He doesn't appreciate a delayed reply on WhatsApp. Usually, he scolds me due to the same. Because of these rules, I am not able to chat with my sisters and sisters-in-law freely. These days, they even mock me regarding my phone usage. Their husbands are also working abroad; they don't have to go through the things that I face.

With the deeper conversations, I realised that the respondent named Lubna uses WhatsApp when her husband is 'online' and that he wants to know when she uses WhatsApp and other messaging applications. She contemplates the bizarre circumstance of being constantly watched

by her husband, as well as the patriarchal society in which she lives. In this ‘virtual patriarchal’ society, she experiences major limitations in terms of freedom of expression and choice. Even parents place great importance on marriage and finding suitable alliances for their daughters. None of them cares about the surveillance their daughters face in their daily lives after marriage, primarily the surveillance caused by mobile phones. One of the respondents said that If the parents were aware of their daughters' terrible circumstances, most of them would advise their daughters to adjust, while others would take the husband's side and would not give any support to women. However, these women struggle to cope with the new kind of space created by surveillance. Koskela (2000) argues that this “surveillance is changing the nature of space or is producing a new kind of space” (p.248). It is hard to imagine how new advanced technology has impacted each woman’s life, specifically the Left-behind wives.

Furthermore, Sheridan (2016) points out that society is conditioned to accept institutional control measures; we are likewise conditioned to overlook and normalise them. I have noted that social beings (I denote here, Left-behind wives as social beings) are always being conditioned to institutional setup measures and are trying to become part of the normalised setup. The following narratives offer the conditioned behaviour of the Left-behind wives to their husbands’ institutional setup and patriarchal decisions. One of the key respondents, named Shabna, thirty-two years old, a graduate and mother of two, found a partner through a love marriage and stayed in a separate home near her home. She was an accountant in a small firm before her marriage, but she quit the job after marriage, according to her husband’s decision. She says:

My husband has been working in Dammam for more than nine years. He has enough savings now. Yet, he is against the idea of buying me a smartphone. I had asked him multiple times. He doesn't like it when I contact my friends via the phone. He keeps saying that the Internet is an active platform that encourages infidelity. And I think that it is true. I am also afraid of using a smartphone now. We do not do video calls. He usually calls me on my Nokia set. I am comfortable with it.

She continued about her employment views and her experiences,

I had to resign from my previous job. My parents had hoped that I would be able to continue with the job as we were in a relationship already. He was not ready to send me for any kind of job. He told me that I was supposed to look after our children and

his parents. Later on, I got used to this. He sends me the amount that I ask for and doesn't restrict me with regard to the use of the same. I think I am happier these days, as I get to spend a lot of time with my kids.

The above case is similar to other respondents too. This manifestation indicates the nature of the society in which they are formally adopted. The Left-behind wives compromise according to their husbands' aspirations in most situations. They are obliged to adapt to their husband's timetables, and the final say in any matters in the family (especially financial matters) is that of the husbands.

In sum, this chapter attempts to analyse the experiences of the Left-behind wives' in Malabar. I conclude that Left-behind wives who stay away from their partners for a long period in their native places have to face multi-faceted challenges, including a lack of proper mobility according to their wishes and convenience and the lack of mental security. I identified from the field that Left-behind wives are virtually monitored in a globalised modern patriarchal society. Globalisation has a rich history associated with the emergence of modernity. As a result of modernisation, we live in a virtual world which is quick and scalable. Modernity always promotes cultural hegemony throughout the world. The behaviour towards women based on an overarching traditional predicament fosters the patriarchy, especially the 'invisible and virtual patriarchy'. In fact, the effect of the "connected presence" of migrant husbands on these Left-behind wives may be positive, negative or both. In this context, the Left-behind wives and their husbands have had various arguments and compromises. As a result, more attention is needed to the process of confronting, negotiating, and reconstructing the life situations of the Left-behind wives. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will explore the various negotiations and manoeuvring that Left-behind wives face in northern Kerala's virtual patriarchal society.

Summary

The chapter helped me unfold a nuanced picture of the lives of the Left-behind wives and the effect of ICT-based new communication technologies on their daily lives. The new communication patterns generate a sense of emotional closeness and bring down emotional and geographical disruptions. The Internet plays the role of a detrimental and inevitable component in transnational contexts and networks. It has become a part of ongoing patterns in their everyday lives. The use of modern technology in everyday life routines in a virtual patriarchal society has a somewhat

paradoxical but equally crucial significance. The patriarchal system uses modern technology to coerce or persuade people, especially women. The idea of facilitating safety through surveillance has become increasingly complicated, predominantly when safety operates in/through the relationship of power, such as between a husband and a wife. Here, the patriarchal roles take a new name of security but carry various forms of control and restrictions on mobility and socialisation. Therefore, Left-behind wives have to inform each and everything to their husbands, and I have noted from the field that this ICT-based co-presence acted as a double-edged weapon in their routines. Here, I do not attempt to negate the constructive aspects and experiences of modern technology in relation to the Left-behind wives; rather, I attempt to reveal the neglected aspect of modern technology, the form of “mediated patriarchy” that is in operation.

Modern communication technologies have two dimensions: expressive and instrumental. Both expressive and instrumental dimensions are exercised through the calls and messages; they may transcend into forms of care and control, respectively, and these embedded elements of care and control are closely interrelated. Also, the meanings of space, time, and interactions change when their husbands are away. Despite that, some factors continue to be highly influential for women subjects, specifically for the Left-behind wives, such as women’s economic background, educational qualification, employment/ employability, family system, social interaction of the family and religious solace. However, they vary according to their institutional patterns and the relationship between husbands and wives in today’s modern and virtual worlds. Each relationship and experience is different. They are unique, and all have unique experiences too. Some women can quickly adapt to the situations, and others cannot. Their experiences also vary according to their socio-cultural background. The existing family setup, marital setup, kinship setup, and all other institutional patterns (re) shape patriarchy’s dominant ideology, directly and indirectly, in multiple facets of people’s everyday lives. Having said that, there is a necessity to look into how women practice covert strategies of resistance to survive in this structure, which shall be dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter V

Negotiations, Contestations and Strategies of the Left-behind wives

Divided into two sections, this chapter explores the contents in the following manner, with the first section examining the effect of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the respondents' everyday lives. It deals specifically with the emotional well-being and emotional imbalances caused by the husbands' presence, as well as the problems that follow the social stigma associated with Gulf migrants as a possible virus carrier while travelling (or returning home). The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the everyday lives of the Left-behind wives and their families in multiple ways. It also took a toll on the respondents' mental health and well-being due to the husband's presence throughout the lockdown. The power dynamics between the couples within the household and other multifarious orientations of both persons define whether the husband's presence during the lockdown period is beneficial or detrimental to the Left-behind wives.

The second section focuses on the everyday strategies, negotiations, and contestations of the Left-behind wives with dominating imaginaries as devoicing and obedient subjects, as well as everyday acts of resistance that occur outside of dominant imaginaries. I have based this upon an extensive ethnography of Malabar's Left-behind wives and their strategies for resisting various types of power. This chapter also considers how forms of resistance, many of which are invisible and cautious, can effectively counter superiority and hegemony. Further, it examines how they generally overcome the problems associated with male out-migration and their meaningful engagement with exclusionary spaces and their attempt to create their own cultural and socially active spaces.

Concisely, this chapter examines the experiences of the Left-behind wives during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the problems of stigma and emotional experiences, as well as how the Left-behind wives negotiate and compromise over their life circumstances.

Section 1

5.1.1 Experiences from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global spread of novel coronavirus disease has resulted in both positive and negative experiences for the Left-behind wives. The samples for this section were chosen specifically to

represent wives whose husbands returned from the gulf just before the lockdown for their vacation and were stranded in their hometown due to Covid-19 and the resultant lockdown. This section concentrates on the relationship between these husbands and their wives residing in two districts in Kerala, namely Kozhikode and Malappuram. This section also focuses on the respondents' emotional state in the presence of their partners during the lockdown. Further, it attempts to look into the complications associated with the stigma of migrants being considered potential carriers of the virus.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Kerala expatriates has been examined in academia as well as the non-academic public sphere over the past few months. The state chiefly depends on Gulf remittances as their revenue source and 2.1 million emigrants are from Kerala (Rajan & Zachariah, 2018). Thus, the novel coronavirus blocked people's mobility, mobility of emigrants and immigrants worldwide. The pandemic's detrimental consequences worsened their living conditions, caused anomalous casualties, and reduced their opportunities. Migrant workers have faced multiple adversities due to this corona outbreak. The most distressed people in this category are the low-income migrant employees, like those working in unorganised sectors without any formal contract, and are a relatively vast, vulnerable populace (Abraham, 2020; Khanna, 2020). Due to the pandemic, many migrants gave up their desire to travel home for the holidays, and another group of people found themselves stuck in their hometowns after their vacation. The coronavirus pandemic was nothing less than a recession period for most migrants, similar to the condition of the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, which affected the mobility and remittances of migrants (Mohapatra & Ratha, 2010; Rajan & Narayanan, 2010).

According to FAO (2020), the economic downturns, restrictions in the movement and lack of proper health measures aggravated the living condition of migrants during the pandemic. In addition to this, returning migrants also faced the stigma of being considered as potential carriers of the virus from their native places. This negative association severely affected the mental state of returning migrants and their families, resulting in experiences of shame and self-doubt (Chopra & Arora, 2020). As a family of returning migrants, many families were isolated due to society's stigma. Exaggeration and the blame game are normal in any society, but in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, such tendencies visibly caused harm to several migrant workers, as illustrated later. Stigmatised people face unfavourable conditions in their life, including discrimination from

their close circles and hindrances in numerous life outcomes (Link, Yang, Phelan & Collins, 2004; Das, 2020). Also, this outbreak poses challenges to every sector, including health, economic, social and environmental (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

This section focuses on the pandemic's impact on specific groups, namely the Left-behind wives and their migrant husbands, who were stuck in their native places due to the lockdown. I have emphasised the pandemic's impact on the relationship between the Left-behind wives and husbands, with a special focus on gender. Herein, I argue that social distancing, 'stay at home' orders and the subsequent long lockdown act as a double-edged sword in the lives of the Left-behind wives. This section specifically focuses on the ten Left-behind wives from the thirty key respondents included in the primary data whose husbands are with them due to the pandemic. This section argues that Covid-19 has made favourable and unfavourable impacts on various groups based on their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

5.1.1.1. Migration and COVID-19

The migration sector was hit the hardest due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It unsettled both emigrants and immigrants worldwide. With migration and reverse migration happening, migrants faced problems regarding their security and other proper health measures during this period (Dandekar & Ghai, 2020). They have also faced insecurity in all ways, as Cohen (2020) notes:

At this moment then, insecurity takes on new meaning and along several axes. This is particularly true for movers and non-movers. History, geography, as well as the physical and intellectual experience of insecurity, affect decision-making and mobility. The situation is particularly difficult for movers and non-movers as the Corona Virus, the lack of preparation for a pandemic, and the unknowns that surround COVID-19 become an existential threat to security. Real dangers, dangers of life and death, shake the very concept of security as movers and non-movers are forced to make difficult choices between work and life. No less serious and destabilising are the intellectual challenges that face decision-makers as they balance what they know, what they believe and what they fear. (p. 405)

The most vulnerable community during the pandemic were the migrants due to their insecurity along with the existential threat of Covid-19 and the prolonged lockdown. Covid-19 had a severe impact on people's mobility across the world. Among migrant workers, migrant domestic workers have suffered a lot during the pandemic and even faced negligence from the health sector (Liem,

Wang, Wariyanti, Latkin, & Hall, 2020). The government also faced the dilemma between ‘saving lives or saving livelihoods’ during this period (Lee, Mahmud, Morduch, Ravindran, & Shonchoy, 2021; Viscusi, 2020). The lack of mobility and remittances worsened the migrants’ situation, which turned out to be a vital challenge.

5.1.1.2. Gender and COVID-19

Gender inequality begets gender inequality during the Covid-19 pandemic (de Paz, Muller, Boudet & Gaddis, 2020). As with every phenomenon, the pandemic has adversely impacted women more negatively than men. The pandemic was the most severe in-service industry, where a high percentage of women worked, which also contributed to the decline in women's employment opportunities (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey & Tertilt, 2020). Zamarro, Perez-Arce, and Prados (2020) found that “prior recessions have affected traditionally male-dominated sectors like manufacturing, construction or trade, the Covid-19 crisis and its social distancing requirements had its biggest effect on sectors that are more female-dominated, namely the service industry” (p.2). Gebhard, Regitz-Zagrosek, Neuhauser, Morgan and Klein (2020) note that women’s jobs as caretakers in the healthcare system and at home may put them at risk for infectious diseases. Almost 70% of the world's health and social care workers are women, including those who provide direct patient care. Moreover, women are more likely to care for sick relatives or children. Overall, further research is required to comprehend how differences in Covid-19 outcomes and effects between men and women are caused by sex, gender, and the interplay of sex and gender. A particular need exists to evaluate how these gender characteristics affect the manifestation and consequences of the disease.

Working women face hardships related to their childcare responsibilities even from informal caregivers, like other family members, grandparents and neighbours (Zamarro, Perez-Arce, & Prados, 2020). It has become difficult to employ domestic workers and daycare providers during the lockdown period. This pandemic has changed work relationships, particularly affecting women in society. (Reichelt, Makovi, & Sargsyan, 2020). Moehring, Reifenscheid and Weiland (2021) called the recession of the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent gender inequality in employment a “shecession”. The pandemic has affected women’s status quo differently depending on their context and characteristics (de Paz, Muller, Boudet & Gaddis, 2020).

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has also triggered violence against girls and women, increased the amount of violence against them and devastated their lifeworld. UN-Women Regional Director for the Americas and the Caribbean, María-Noel Vaeza (2020, November 27), notes that globally, prior to Covid-19, 1 in 3 women worldwide had experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or non-partner at some point in their lifetime. The term domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence has been interchangeably used, and it includes emotional, sexual and physical violence (Kofman & Garfin, 2020). Seck, Encarnacion, Tinonin, and Duerto-Valero (2021) note that “the pandemic is exacerbating preexisting gender inequalities and threatening fragile gains on gender equality of the last decades” (p.6). Since the outburst of the Covid pandemic, violence against women and girls has intensified in society. The lockdown and its subsequent ‘stay safe at home’ orders also instigated domestic violence and all types of violence against women (Anurudran, Yared, Comrie, Harrison & Burke, 2020; Boserup, McKenney & Elkbuli, 2020; Hsu & Henke, 2021).

Several studies (Bulled & Singer, 2020; Guidorzi, 2020; Zaidi & Ali, 2020) note Covid-19’s psychological impacts and consequences on societies. Economic independence and the mental and physical state of women and girls have been damaged throughout the covid pandemic, which reinforced gender inequality. Throughout the Covid-19 period, the existing gender disparity in society has gotten worse. (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Fodor, Gregor, Koltai, & Kováts, 2020). Ravindran and Shah (2020, p.2) point out that “UN Women has referred to the rise in violence against women (VAW) during the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns as the ‘Shadow Pandemic’ (United Nations Women, 2020)”. The notion of a ‘Shadow pandemic’ points to the increasing rate of violence and exploitation in the home during the corona pandemic, how it impairs existing inequalities and how it distresses the vulnerable population of the country like women, girls, children and elderly people (Snowdon, Barton, Newbury, Parry, Bellis, & Hopkins, 2020; Sri, Das, Gnanapragasam, & Persaud, 2021). The ‘shadow pandemic’ led the way for chronic and traumatic experiences for women (Kofman & Garfin, 2020). Post-traumatic stress disorders were also found among these victims, and they sought medical aid (Godin, 2020). Ausín, González-Sanguino, Castellanos and Muñoz (2021, p.29) point out that “this exceptional situation of confinement was an experience with important psychological implications, including depressive symptoms, psychological distress, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), higher levels of stress and anxiety, insomnia and irritability and loneliness.” Even pregnant women were

adversely affected by Covid-19 infection and faced maternal and neonatal complications during pregnancy (Qiao, 2020).

The following section looks at the emotional experiences of the key respondents, especially the women who were with their partners in their native places for a prolonged period due to the coronavirus pandemic.

5.1.1.3. Emotions in the Pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on the lives of the Left-behind Wives

Covid-19 paved the way for both beneficial and adverse impacts, as per research evidence (Ashraf, 2020; Lau, Khosrawipour, Kocbach, Mikolajczyk, Schubert, Bania, & Khosrawipour, 2020; Verma, & Prakash, 2020), especially for the emigrants, who were stuck at their native place due to the lockdown, which consequently impacted their wives too. Three key respondents in this study expressed feeling emotional closeness, security, and happiness during the pandemic due to their husbands' presence apart from the Covid scare.

Mrs Raihana (31 years old, sociology graduate, mother of a child), who was reflecting on their experiences of remaining together for an extended period due to lockdown, spoke about how much they enjoyed being together. She shares:

I was able to spend more time with my husband due to the lockdown. It had a positive impact on my emotional well-being. Consequently, this mental peace helped me to stay productive. We cooked and ate together. We shared other household chores too. I think it was these simple gestures we exchanged when we were together that helped us to stay in love. Even when we had issues, we could resolve them quickly as we could see and listen to each other. We became more empathetic. We were at peace when we were together.

As evidenced in the aforementioned narrative, Raihana's lived experience of being together for a considerable period of time after their wedding owing to the corona contagion illustrates their satisfaction with reciprocity, respect, understanding, and physicality. A supportive relationship always brings mutual benefits, helps one cope with difficult times, and leads to both parties' emotional well-being. Two more key respondents expressed a similar sense of emotional well-being and shared the happiest moments with their partners during the lockdown period. For instance, Mrs Afeefa, a mother of one child who is twenty-seven years old and preparing for the

Kerala PSC examinations, had the opportunity to spend one year and five months with her spouse in their native place. Her husband began working from home as a result of the lockdown directives. She expressed her ideas about how being with her husband brought her mental happiness, how he supported her in pursuing her studies, and how they helped each other with cooking, cleaning, and all other domestic duties, saying:

We were able to spend almost one year and five months together due to the outbreak of COVID-19. It was the first time since our marriage that we got to spend these many days together. It was such a pleasant experience, and we enjoyed it a lot. His presence helped me to stay healthy. I was able to focus on my studies for longer durations. We cooperated with each other and did household activities together. I was able to understand his work schedule better and hence stopped getting emotional about his absence. We were really happy together, and life got better.

One of the primary respondents, Lubna, who is thirty years old, has two children, and is from the Malappuram district, provided a similar response:

I have been married for ten years now. Despite all these years of marriage, we barely stayed together for more than 20 days straight due to his work. During a pandemic, he was with me for eight long months. Over these eight months, we grew stronger emotionally. And I felt a huge sense of relief. Wives of Gulf migrants who stay back in Kerala are burdened with all sorts of responsibilities, be it taking care of the children or other household chores; everything is on us. When my husband and I lived together for an extended period, I had someone to share my responsibilities. I could live more freely.

Among ten key respondents, three shared positive experiences and mental happiness with their partners during the lockdown period. Indeed, all ten respondents have different perceptions and opinions on this. Saleena, a Left-behind wife from Malappuram with two children, commented on the traumatic events related by three of the primary interviewees, saying:

My husband got home in February 2020. He could not go back due to the lockdown. So, we were together in the same place for a long time. Even though I like having him

around, I get irked by his possessiveness. I almost feel like a fish out of water. He doesn't like it when I interact with someone, even if it is a woman. I am not allowed to talk to other men. My husband is very sceptical. Even when the woman in my neighbourhood tries to initiate talk with me, I do not engage with them so as to not irritate my husband. They might get hurt if he ends up scolding them. Even when my cousins and relatives visit me, I cannot interact freely with them if my husband is around. I used to be freer in his absence.

Another significant source, Mrs Jumaila, a Left-behind wife from Malappuram who is 39 years old and has three children, described a similar type of event. She revealed:

Due to Covid, my husband is at home. Now that my husband is home, it is hard to move around. Home feels like some kind of jail. He has a volatile temper, and if I instigate him somehow, he makes it a point to teach me a lesson; many times, it gets physically violent. Even the smallest of mistakes are blown out of proportion; Now I have gotten used to physical violence. He is good sometimes; he buys me things. Initially, when I used to get beaten, I used to endure the pain for my children. Everything gets back to normal when he goes back to work. Sometimes, he says mean things over the phone. But at least there is no physical pain involved. Covid came as a trap for me. I am actually scared to live with him. I really don't know what pisses him off. I would not say that I like living with him. I keep praying for his quick return.

The presence of their partners during lockdown days brought happiness and emotional well-being to three of the ten respondents, and at the same time, three other respondents discussed painful incidents that took place in their lives. Three of the ten respondents said that they are not happy with their marriages and do not enjoy their time with their husbands. Their partner's controlling and abusive behaviour is a major factor in why they are happy in long-distance relationships. Several studies (Buttall & Ferreira, 2020; Roesch, Amin, Gupta, & García-Moreno, 2020) note the connection between Covid-19 and Intimate Partner Violence, and it has argued that intimate partner violence has increased during lockdown days. Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) argue that “physical violence involves forceful physical contact that may vary from light pushes and slaps to severe beatings and lethal violence” (p.2). Despite severe physical violence, most of them are afraid to reveal it for several reasons. Buttall and Ferreira (2020) note that, in

several cases of Intimate Partner Violence, women are scared of being alone with their abusive spouses and suffer from social withdrawal. They hesitate to share the same with their families and loved ones out of guilt and embarrassment. They are also scared of the probable reaction of their abusive partner, who might end up will distressing them, their children, or family members.

While coming to the next set of respondents, I have identified that a few Left-behind wives want their husbands to stay with them and compel them to discontinue their current job and find a job in their hometown. However, the husband does not like doing the job in his hometown, and he wants to return to the Gulf soon. Ayisha, a Kozhikode-based Left-behind wife who is 38 years old and has a high school diploma, shared:

I like living with my husband. I know that he keeps going back to the gulf so that he could earn more and thus give us a secure future. I miss him. His presence soothes me. It's always a relief to have him around. We could have shared our responsibilities in looking after the children. But he does not like being here and is worried about our financial future. We have two daughters, and he is concerned about their marriage expenses. He does not want to settle here anytime soon. He says that he will consider moving back after some years. He is too worried about the money. Despite all this, I prefer that he stay with me. We could live together for nine months due to the pandemic. My children and I really enjoyed those times.

In the aforementioned case, the husband worries more about their family's financial security than romantic and emotional satisfaction. Nevertheless, the wife always wants her partner and children together for their better mental health and emotional well-being. She speaks of the importance of the emotional bond between father and children, stating:

My children and husband developed an emotional bond during the lockdown. For them, he is just someone who gets them their favourite gifts from the gulf. Even though they used to talk over the phone, they were not that close. It was painful to see him yearning for his children, as they remained emotionally distant with him due to the physical distance. The lockdown came as a marked change, as he was able to bond over with them during this period. They are best friends now. I wish he could stay on, as I want him to have a stronger bond with the kids.

A respondent who is 38 years old, attended the ninth grade and is a mother of three children, Mrs Abida, shared comparable experiences:

When the father is a Gulf migrant, it is hard to form a bond with the children. I can't blame any of them for the lack of attachment. The nature of his work is such that he will be able to come home only once a year, barely for a month, due to which the kids remain distant from their father. Due to the lockdown, he was here for a long while this time and the kids became close to him. This reduced my tension to a large extent. Earlier, he was someone to whom they talked over the phone. Now that he was here in flesh and blood, he was able to tend to each and every need of the children. I felt at peace. I also felt as if I was able to share the responsibilities which I used to do alone earlier.

Some studies also identified a lack of emotional attachment among the parents and children in transnational families compared to non-transnational families (Cloutier, Manion, Walker, & Johnson, 2002; Graham & Jordan, 2011). This section showed that lockdown enabled emotional attachment and bonding among parents and children in migrant households. It facilitated the strengthening of mutual bonds and the psychological well-being of each other. Out of the ten respondents, one related a dialogue that was comparable. This respondent talked about how a father's relocation affected the family's psychological well-being, emotional closeness, and parent-child relationships while he was abroad. The relationship between parents and children always helps the children develop emotion regulation, co-regulation of emotion, and emotion reactivity (Borelli, Crowley, David, Sbarra, Anderson & Mayes, 2010; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994).

Another group of respondents had a different opinion; while reflecting on their experiences, Naseema, a Left-behind wife from Malappuram, forty years old, who resides in a newly constructed home near to husband's brother's house with her four children, stated:

I do not mind him going to the Gulf because we want to be financially stable. It will not happen if my husband stays here. One is not paid much here, and the expenses are high. It just keeps on piling up. We want to renovate our house. Educate our children and marry them off. All this means more money. So, I do not mind him leaving me and

going to the gulf. We want to improve our financials. He stayed for a long due to COVID. What is the point of staying here for too long if we do not have enough money? It does not mean that we do not want to live together. We are now more focused on the financials. There is an urge to be secure.

Moreover, WhatsApp is there, and we can do a video call whenever we feel like it. We do not have to live together to know what is going on. We are always in touch; that is enough for us.

The aforementioned narrative shows their concern about financial security than emotional and sexual intimacy. I have found a sense of emotional neutrality among these couples. Similar opinions were expressed by another respondent, who is content with long-distance relationships. These two crucial respondents emphasized that a major driving force behind migration is financial stability. Concurrently, they stressed the role of communication technologies in levelling the emotional interaction among partners across the distance (Baldassar, 2007). With the proliferation of communication technology, communication frequency increased, facilitated extended emotional support and maintained a family bond across physical proximity.

The responses that I have collected from the sources helped to analyse the impact of Covid-19 on their lives. I was able to trace their emotional state in the presence of their partners during the lockdown period. Each experience is unique based on its socioeconomic background in society. The lockdown period, according to the narrations, helped one group of the Left-behind wives with their emotional health while simultaneously serving as a double-edged weapon in their daily routines for another group of Left-behind wives. Apart from the fear of the disease, it had different effects on each individual, including positive, neutral, and adverse effects. In addition to the emotional experiences of the Left-behind wives due to their husband's presence, I have looked into the difficulties related to the stigma they faced as a return migrant families in their native place. When migrants return home, they face social alienation, discrimination, and stigma that lead them to a higher risk of psychological disorders; similar to the present situation of healthcare workers in society, they have become the victims of public rejection and discontentment (Singh, & Subedi, 2020; Xiong, & Peng, 2020). Furthermore, the public health response to Covid-19 potentially increased stigma and prejudice. For example, social distancing norms, which are

necessary to keep the disease from spreading, can lead to the ‘othering’ of those who are affected (Chopra & Arora, 2020).

Gulf migrants who were once treated as honourable recipients due to the remittances from Gulf countries were labelled as possible virus carriers. Regrettably, because of the social stigma linked with Covid-19, returning migrants are being labelled, separated, and faced with loss of status and discrimination. Even the family members of the returning migrants also met the social stigma and isolation from society.

Irfana, a 30 years old respondent who completed VHSE (Vocational Higher Secondary Examination) course and stayed with her in-laws and her children, shared the reactions of their neighbours as well as her emotional condition due to society’s disapproval against returning migrants when her husband returned home, says:

My husband was quarantined on the upper floor of our home. Our neighbours were a bit reluctant to come around, Due to his arrival. When my son went to the grocery shop during that time, he was scolded for not being careful. People were afraid of getting infected. Since he was under quarantine, our neighbours thought that we were also infected. They used to say that, “Your father came from the gulf; you should be not roam around carelessly”. It hurt him and made him feel humiliated. After that incident, he refused to go grocery shopping. When we went out to get emergency supplies, we overheard specific conversations. They treated us as if we were carriers. It was a painful period.

Rashad, another respondent, a Gulf returnee who had worked in Dubai for seven years, lost his job due to the covid pandemic and returned home; he demonstrated the societal and even familial responses to him when he returned during the corona pandemic:

I returned to India in June 2020, when the pandemic was at its peak. I was quarantined at a nearby school. I got such a terrible experience from my neighbours and friends. It's good to be concerned of one's health; however, they should have called me. They didn't think that I will infect them over the call. That was the case. When I used to come home before Corona, all my cousins used to be delighted to meet me, and we used to have a good time together. However, this time, it was different. No one was concerned

for me. I think they used to avoid my calls, thinking that I might ask them for any financial help. I do not know. Also, after a 28-day quarantine, when I went to a nearby grocery store, everyone gazed at me weirdly. They did not even bother to acknowledge me.

He proceeded to talk about his family's reaction while returning home:

Except my wife, no one supported me when I told them that I wanted to come back during the lockdown period. My parents were more concerned about the neighbours' reaction. They were completely unempathetic towards me. They believed that neighbours would try to exclude them if I came back. Even my brother advised me to stay in the gulf, claiming that he would be unable to go to his work and other engagements if I returned. Those were the times when I felt emotionally distant from my family.

The lived experiences of key respondents revealed social stigma and the issues associated with it. Gulf migrants had a reputation in their home country before the pandemic, but they are now being seen as virus carriers. Due to discrimination, lack of a sufficient support system, and stigmatization, the pandemic has not only affected son people's physical health but also wreaked havoc on people's mental health. People's emotional expressions have changed as a result of the global pandemic, as well as their emotional experiences.

Section 2

5.2 Left-behind Wives: Mapping the “*Everyday Forms of Resistance*.”

As Desai and Banerji (2008) and Louhichi (1997) note how male migration has led to the augmentation of women’s autonomy and decision-making responsibility in a nuclear family. However, ubiquitous connectedness emerged as a result of technological advancements, and they became a part of a “bounded sociality” (Ling, 2008). In their everyday life, they can indeed have a bifocality between “there” and “here” at the same time (Kim,2021; Levitt & Schiller, 2004). As a result, men began to be informed of everything that occurred at home, creating the impression that he was at home. It gradually led to the control of the Left-behind wives’ movements and limited their mobility. Nevertheless, the Left-behind wives adopted new strategies and methods appropriate for the digital realm as “*everyday forms of resistance*”. Knowing how the Left-behind wives negotiate and compromise between their personal family life and the larger cultural world of patriarchal society is of utmost importance. Also, this section confronts the conventional paradigms that define resistance/confrontations as not only activities that are observable but also incite the need to redo the structures of power; it reveals how resistance can take many other forms and need not particularly fulfil these prerequisites. Thus, in this second section, I have tried to explore and understand the strategies and negotiations of the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala from their standpoints.

Women’s everyday struggles and acts of resistance are particular to them and depend on their multiple identities. These spaces might range from the privacy of the bedroom to the public spaces. I tried to respond to the following queries in this section: How do women who are subjected to universal devaluation vary from men who hold a culturally superior place in society in terms of everyday forms of resistance? How do women deal with patriarchy when their husbands want to perpetuate it? What are their strategies for subverting patriarchy? As Left-behind wives in a patriarchal society’s informal and formal economies, field data revealed that almost all wives (apart from their various identities) experienced mistreatment, discrimination, domestic abuse, and emotional and financial vulnerability. ‘Marginalisation’ and ‘under-representation’ of women in general, particularly Muslim women in Kerala, is reflected in all facets of life, including household, social, and political realms. Rather than looking at the structural system in which they live and work, we need to look at the subjective experience of the Left-behind wives (how they

define themselves), how they engage meaningfully with exclusionary spaces, and how they create their own active social and cultural spaces.

Space is not a clean slate or a blank canvas but rather a platform within which “social interactions,” particularly those of power, are constructed (Giddens, 1987). The space can equate with the term ‘*contact zone*’, which was coined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991), a comparative literature scholar, to describe the sites where cultures collide, conflict, and struggle with one another, typically in extremely uneven power relations. Each confrontation and compromise is defined by the relationship between the interaction and cohabitation of their ‘*contact zone*.’ Thus, I tried to explore how women live through norms within multiple tasks of self-making rather than just looking for clues of resistance against patriarchal standards, as Saba Mahmood (2005) did in her work *Politics of Piety*. By examining how these women's distinctive womanhood and identities develop diverse types of women's resilience, the ethnographic fieldwork of this study seeks to empower these women rather than concentrating solely on patriarchal influences and cultural context as justifications for their subordination.

In the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott (1990) supports the claim that every subordinate group uses covert forms of resistance that are hidden from superior groups, known as “infra politics.” Therefore, every group has its own “infra politics” to address and deal with life circumstances. Specifically, migrant husbands are dominant over the Left-behind wives in a patriarchal society where men are dominant and women are subordinate groups. Field data show that Left-behind wives have also employed “infra politics,” covert means of defiance, to guarantee their psychological safety and comfort in the cultural environment. Nonetheless, people—particularly women—resisted and used negotiating strategies and methods that have gotten less scholarly attention. Surprisingly, the methods and contestations of the Left-behind wives in the digital sphere have been unexplored for the longest period; as a result, this part merits considerable attention as well. It concentrates on the everyday forms of resistance used by the Left-behind wives in their lifeworld in the contemporary virtual society rather than the prevalent notion of universal enslavement of women and seeing them as passive recipients of social change (Ortner, 1972).

In the Western world, Asian women have historically been stereotyped as sexually objectified, submissive, and defenceless (Cullen, 2002). Scott (1985) offers a different perspective

on the everyday acts of resistance fought by a group of agricultural labourers in the Malaysian town of Sedaka in his book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*. It investigates the techniques used by agricultural labourers to fight various forms of dominance, as well as how they are used. My interest in feminist thoughts and feminist perspectives assisted me in identifying the Left-behind wives as active participants in the socio-cultural and economic space around them rather than being passive followers of their husbands and the patriarchal structure within their families. I understood the authority and subjection people experience in society and their strategies through their narratives. They must also encounter several multilayered and everyday forms of dominance and humiliation that frequently cross these women's lives. These confrontations may make it more difficult for them to tackle the problem in the way they intend. However, each woman has developed ways to address the challenges related to their husband's migration and as a Left-behind wife in Kerala society. This section locates the study of everyday forms of resistance of the Left-behind wives in Malabar; the inquiry centres on the domestic space as the main site where strategies, negotiations, and contestations occur.

Taking a cue from the fact that these women come from diverse backgrounds, it is to be understood that their approaches differ depending on their multiple social orientations in Kerala society. I have also tried to fathom how 'women's logic is utilized in the absence of their husbands for the cause of parenting. Also, this section explicitly looks at how the Left-behind wives employed tactical approaches to make their family and marital lives easier when their husbands were away from them for employment purposes. Contrary to the popular assumption of viewing women as a universally subjugated category, this research demonstrates how women engaged as active agents in society through strategies, negotiations, and contestations.

5.2.1. Strategies Before and After the Proliferation of Communication Technology

Different narratives of the Left-behind wives, particularly those who are more than forty years old, disclose details on how women contested and strategised even before and after the breakthroughs of communication technology. According to the respondents, Left-behind wives had more access and a permissive environment in the early decades compared to the modern period, which is characterised by a higher rate of technological growth. Given the limited choices for communication in the early period for the couples, one can identify a twofold effect; one being the aspect of the emotional turmoil and resultant imbalance experienced by the Left-behind wives. On

the other hand, it also aided them in avoiding modern surveillance via cell phones and CCTV cameras. Both the pre-technological and post-technological periods have advantages and disadvantages, just like any other object.

Suhara, a key informant who is 48 years old, has three children, has completed schooling till the eighth grade, and she lives close to her husband's family's ancestral house in Kozhikode district. Suhara related her experiences in comparison to how she currently uses smartphones:

This is before the smartphone era. Back then, I never had to inform my husband before going to my house. Sometimes I would inform my in-laws that I am going home. I'd tell them that some relatives are visiting or that there is a family get-together. I would cook up some stories. My husband does not really appreciate my frequent visits to my maternal home. But I would lie to my in-laws and go stay there with my kids. I used to have a small Nokia phone with me then. So even if he would call, I'd go to a secluded room in the house to attend the call so that he does not suspect anything. I'd act as if I am at his house. If he asks for the kids, I would say that they are outside playing. What if they tell him that we are at my house by mistake?

One of the key respondents accurately noted how the limited communication during the early period decreased the likelihood of interpersonal conflict. They didn't have as much time to talk to them as they do now, so they would only ask about the health and education of their kids before handing the phone to the next family member in order to avoid losing money on the long-distance call. With the advent of smartphones and internet access, the situation has changed, and the partners now know everything about each other's daily life. As a result, both the likelihood of conflict and the opportunity for dialogue among partners has increased. As Giddens put it, in today's virtual environment, sophisticated communication technology serves as both a constraint and an enabler, enabling in the sense of creating opportunities for communication and expressing love while constraining in the sense of monitoring and limiting their choices for unrestricted movement (see the Chapter Four). However, everybody finds their own means of survival and alternate means of negotiating in the modern virtual world.

On dealing with the anticipation of the possible rejection that her husband would put forward on any of her upcoming activities, Mrs Suhara, one of my respondents, revealed her current strategy when on how she deals with the same.:

But now, things are different. These days if I'm up to something which my husband does not like and he calls while I'm at it, I do not attend his call, no matter what. I would rather die than attend his call. I call him back later with some excuse, such as a prayer, shower or something similar.

The majority of the key respondents used this expression, *I do not attend the call no matter what*, which led me to believe that it was one of their go-to tactics once they started utilising smartphones because, in most cases, the husband makes the video call. They claimed that they began telling more lies than before the use of the smartphone, and Suhara added with a burst of laughter that “*it is acceptable to tell lies in a husband-and-wife relationship, and that the Quran allows this if the relationship is to be maintained*.” It indicates how the respondents use their religious convictions as justification to negotiate lies within their relationships.

Shahana, another respondent, shared:

He may sometimes ask me to go to the weddings of his close friends or family members, but I am a little hesitant to do so since he gives me strict instructions before the event. I usually make up reasons not to go, such as having a headache or stomach ache from menstruation. I went to the event without informing him first, and when I came back from it, I contact him immediately to let him know that I went because my sister and her husband had driven over. After that, I will add, "I tried to reach you at that time to let you know, but you were not online." Even this quick exchange of information regarding where we are going is a part of my strategy to lessen the severity of any potential future conflict between us. Because of his vast connections, I am certain that He will get to know whether I attended the event or not.

Haseena, a crucial source who is 32 years old, a mother of 2, and who has been living in a separate home in her husband's hometown, describes what happens when she visits a neighbour's or her brother's house without telling her husband:

I switch my phone to aeroplane mode when I visit a neighbour or family member without my husband's consent. After a while, if he reprimands me for being unavailable, I blame it on the kids. I tell him that they were playing on with the phone while I was busy cooking. He can't say anything to that, So; he always tells me to keep the phone

away from the kids – that's it! He won't poke the matter any further. I do it because he does not like me going next door to talk. Even if I seek his permission, he denies it. That is how he is. Even when I visit my brother, who lives nearby, I make it a point to put the phone in aeroplane mode. I do tell my brother that I've come without my husband's permission and so that he doesn't end up spilling the beans if my husband calls.

Other respondents employ these strategies with the assistance of their kids by providing sweets or their preferred meal. Having a shared understanding with their children helps women manage their problems and prevent conflict with their partners. Shareefa disclosed:

My husband doesn't approve of me interacting with our neighbours. He usually calls me after the evening's Asar prayer. I make it a point to get back home to attend to his call properly at that time. In case there is an unexpected call, my children make up for it by taking the call. They usually give some excuses to buy me time. And then, they inform me right away regarding his call. They know that he tends to get really angry with me for these things. My kids try to help me out a lot.

According to the aforementioned accounts, their kids helped them avoid any potential arguments. In these situations, it's important to note that most of the kids are older than six and are starting to comprehend what's going on around them. When I heard this, it piqued my interest, so I asked why their children support their mother. I discovered that they are conscious of their fathers' behaviours and attitudes and that if there is discord between their parents, it will also have an impact on their day-to-day activities. One child explained, *“If they do not get along, mom will be in a terrible mood, she will get furious with us and yell at us for everything, and she will not prepare deliciously and cook anything without bothering our likes.”* Children's support could be viewed as a form of resistance and a strategy to keep a happy family together.

The emotional contestations and negotiations of key respondents in modern times are examined in the following subsection.

5.2.1.1. Emotional Contestations and Negotiations in Modern Times

Everyone has emotions and has lived with them for a long time, dealing with, controlling, identifying and managing the emotions of people they interact with (Pernau, 2016). The emotions and emotional experiences we feel have a significant impact on who we are, what we think, and

what we do (Tappolet, 2016). As a result, emotional negotiation and contestation differ depending on a person's social location and distinct identities.

Moreover, we live in the digital era, where everyone has created strategies for expressing their emotions via modern communication technology. As per the era in which they belong, everyone adopts some form of strategy. Like everyone, the Left-behind wives (specifically those with access to modern communication technologies) find innovative ways to counteract their husbands' male aggression and display their aggression through mobile phones, such as placing their phones in aeroplane mode and remaining unavailable on WhatsApp chat. Some of them said that whenever any quarrel happens between them, they will not answer the phone for a week (maybe), and when he calls, they give the phone to the kids and talk.

One of the key respondents, Mrs Sajida, revealed that if she is not on good terms with her husband, he does not contact her, she does not call him, and they both contact their eldest daughter and end up complaining against each other. While conversing with them, I learned that they are a nuclear family of three children, two girls and one boy and that her oldest daughter is pursuing post-graduate studies at a prestigious central university. Because their oldest daughter is older than the other kids and is better able to come up with answers to problems, she shares everything with her.

My husband usually sends me money at the beginning of the month. If we ever happen to be fighting or are on bad terms around that time, he refuses to send in money. He waits for me to ask him, and I never do that. Instead, I ask my daughter to ask him. She is doing her masters now and lives in a hostel, so she usually asks for money from him, stating some college expenses. She helps me out a lot during these bad phases with my husband.

She added:

My husband disapproves of me going to certain places and mingling with particular relatives. He stops calling me for a couple of days if he finds out that I did something he doesn't like approve of. He treats me poorly. Generally, during such times, I make my daughter speak to him on my behalf. She tells him that I am miserable as he is not talking with me and asks him to stop being angry at me. My daughter supports me a lot in that way.

Most of the time, children stand by their mothers during difficult times and even help resolve disagreements between parents. I have heard of children, particularly youngsters over the age of ten, mediating disagreements and clashes between parents in nuclear families. However, raising children alone is a challenging task, and most Left-behind wives perform this by continuing to take on all responsibilities in their life. Thus, the following section addresses the approaches and negotiations of the Left-behind wives over child-rearing while their husbands are away (see section 5.2.1.2).

5.2.1.2 Responsibility and Approaches while Raising Children During Husband's Absence

Data from several studies show how the outmigration of men ends up transferring the obligation of child care and rearing solely to women of the household (Karki,1998; Maharjan, Bauer, & Knerr, 2012). Parenthood is a challenging task for single women parents, and raising children necessitates more power in this patriarchal culture. Thus, I argue that being a single parent while her husband is away is also a part of the contestations and negotiations of the Left-behind wives. More specifically, being a single woman parent in the absence of her husband in this patriarchal society, where men's voices are always dominant and privileged, is a situation that creates stress, confusion, and emotional disturbances for the majority of the Left-behind wives. They have, however, adopted various tactics and managed this obligation to some extent as part of their lifeworld's endurance. In brief, understanding how Left-behind wives raise their children as single parents and how these adjustment and adaptation processes interact within family dynamics necessitates more attention.

In nuclear families, women's autonomy and decision-making power increase, as well as their responsibility towards the children. Louhichi (1997) has noted that women hold financial and emotional influence in nuclear households. With the increasing power, women have to confront many difficulties in nuclear families, like being single parents to their children while their husbands are away. Compared to extended families and joint families in contemporary society, women from nuclear families face more complications regarding their children's upbringing. Many mothers are expected to take full responsibility for the wrongdoings of their kids, even if they have any relationships or indulge in other antisocial behaviour. Therefore, the majority of the respondents stated that they frequently updated their husbands regarding their children's activities and monitored them regularly. By constantly asking what was going on at school and among their

peers, mothers try to remain engaged. Some of the respondents said that they gradually formed a good rapport with their children to have an open conversation with them at any moment. They minimise their stress and anxiety about their children by communicating openly and being good friends with them. They sought to give the impression that their mothers constantly observed and cared for them and made frequent visits to their bedrooms. To ensure that their children studied properly, mothers insisted that their children study in the open area rather than in their bedrooms. These mechanisms and procedures are dependent on the age of the children; applying these methods to children under the age of ten would not be appropriate.

The procedures and measures for children under the age of ten are different. Some key respondents shared that they deal with mischievous or naughty children (under ten years old) by giving them their favourite toys, chocolates, and cartoon dresses to make them cool and discourage their grumpy attitude. When children engage in good things (such as regular studying without parental pressure, eating properly, praying five times regularly, and being obedient), the same approach is used as positive reinforcement. Positive and negative reinforcement⁷⁵ are used to modify children's behaviour and promote desired behaviour while lowering negative habits (Bernier, Simpson & Rose, 2012). Thus, mothers have traditionally employed varied reinforcements to motivate and encourage their children to be good citizens. Possibilities for positive reinforcement have vastly changed in recent years, such as permitting to download new games to a mobile phone, extending break time for mobile phone use, providing new gadgets, and so on. It all depends on the children's age and gender, as well as the family's financial situation. Further, mothers occasionally tell their children that they report them to their father if they continue to misbehave, who will stop sending them gifts.

Furthermore, most women are concerned about their children's academic development or progress. According to studies, higher academic performance is related to lower parental authoritarianism and greater parental authoritativeness (Leung, Lau & Lam, 1998; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Mothers are held accountable for the poor academic achievements of

⁷⁵Positive reinforcement is a method that involves adding a stimulus after a behaviour is performed to increase the likelihood of that response. Positive-reinforcement teaching techniques use non-confrontational methods to work a child's brain – rewarding good behaviour, establishing rituals and mentoring actions that are incongruent with wrongdoings and reducing a child's anger and frustration – all while letting the child feel good on the inside. Negative reinforcement is the encouragement of certain behaviours by removing or avoiding a negative outcome or stimuli. People typically use this technique to help children learn a desired behavior.

their kids. As a result, most mothers try to spend a significant amount of time teaching their children, and some have made arrangements for tuition. During exam time, a few key respondents revealed that they made their children rise up early in the morning, around 3 a.m. or 4 a.m., and mothers would also wake up and sit with them, giving coffee or tea as well as their children's favourite delicacies.

Another major point raised by the respondents is that most of the children, especially teenagers, are indifferent about their mothers and are only concerned about their fathers. Even their mother's opinion on a subject is not respected. The mothers often report to their father their behaviour, and she would blackmail the children by stating that she would inform their father regarding their behaviour. Sibling rivalry among her children is something she frequently notes and communicates to her husband. The majority of the respondents also cited sibling strife as a source of stress. Sibling conflict is commonly considered the most typical source of family strife and troubling behaviour. (Leitenberg, Burchard, Burchard, Fuller & Lysaght, 1977). Some key respondents said that most of the time, mothers are unable to mediate between their children as they do not even consider their mother's presence. Therefore, upbringing children as single parents while the husband is away is a hardship. Parenting becomes even more beautiful when both parents are together with their children. As single parents, with their husbands being away, the Left-behind wives try to manage by being good friends to them, negotiating or being open with them, expressing compassion, resolving a conflict without throwing a temper tantrum, and discussing their concerns. They spend a lot of energy as well as time on child upbringing, family functioning, and psychological well-being.

In addition, women have taken more effort into their emotionality as parental emotionality (Parke & Ladd, 2016) directly links with children's emotional regulation (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, et al., 1996) and emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Self-soothing, avoiding distressing events and arousing stimuli, and restraining emotionally motivated actions are all examples of emotional regulation strategies (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). Parents shape social-emotional development, social skills and emotion regulation through parent-child interaction (Parke & Ladd, 2016).

The economy plays a significant role in any studies related to migration. Most of the migrants toil in the Gulf countries, leaving their families back home so that they can financially

secure their family members. The absence of men in the hometown invariably attaches more power to the Left- behind women who take decisions for the family on behalf of their absentee husbands. They tackle the element of the economy by resorting to various mechanisms to run the family. The following subsection explored the economic strategies and approaches used by the Left-behind wives as a means of coping.

5.2.1.3. Economic Strategies of the Left-behind Wives

Except for a few, most of the Left-behind wives in my study are not working women. As a result, the majority of them rely on their spouses for personal finances. Most spouses do not offer them extra money for their personal investment; instead, they give them money whenever they want or send a substantial amount of money to their account, which they take whenever they need it. Some respondents stated that they are answerable to their husbands about their expenditures. Every time they update their husbands regarding the expense, they purposefully add an extra amount so that they can set that money aside as savings without letting them know. One of the key respondents named Majida shared:

Since I don't work, all our expenses are handled by my husband. He sends me the exact amount every month. Occasionally, I lie to him about the price so that I can save up some additional money and indulge in something I fancy, like cosmetics. My husband doesn't appreciate me spending on beauty products. There are times when I like a piece of garment that is out of budget for my husband. At that time, I used up my savings to purchase the same. My children and I love fast food, but my husband doesn't. So, we also use this money to buy and eat whatever we want.

Sakeena, a mother of two girls belonging to a middle-class family who is 38 years old and has completed her schooling till the 7th grade, revealed that she secretly takes money from her husband's wallet while he is on vacation at home, usually when he uses the bathroom and the toilet. The respondent further revealed that they resort to these mechanisms as they are unemployed. Most of the time, their husbands don't provide for their personal expenses. They also do not want it to be interpreted as 'theft,' as they simply take money that belongs to them and indulge God in their dealings, hoping that He would forgive them. They make sure not to take out large amounts as it might be noticed by their husbands. Somehow women managed to save penny amounts that subsequently accumulated into large sums that they spent without informing their husbands; some

of them engaged in various economic endeavours and deposited their money, including the *Kudumbashree*⁷⁶ programme and other chits, which do not need as much effort as going to the bank and depositing money. *Kudumbashree*'s foundation is made up of Neighbourhood Groups (NHG), which offer microcredit and micro-deposits, and *Kudumbashree*'s credit model identifies it as an "informal communal financial institution." (Bhaskar, 2015, p.13).

Another group of respondents indicated that they give away their savings to their husbands when they are in need without alerting them that it is their savings by pretending that they borrowed money from a neighbour with the knowledge of the neighbour; this mostly happened among intimate neighbours. The "intimate neighbour" is highlighted here because, in most of these cases, the husband returns the money to them directly or keeps promising that he will repay them soon. Also, most of them do not want to discuss their family concerns with everyone or make them public; as a result, the respondent always uses her close neighbour's identity to prevent extra complications. Furthermore, if husbands are aware that it is their wives' savings (pocket money), they might fail to return it or take a long time to do so, and if they do, husbands might order that the money be used for their other expenses, resulting in a loss of her savings. Consequently, most Left-behind wives do not reveal their savings to their husbands as wives would not receive the money whenever they want it.

The next subsection addresses the contestations and tactics of the Left-behind wives' and their strategies to make the social space comfortable.

5.2.1.4. Social Manoeuvring and Contestations in Public Spaces

Passivity and negligence are tactical decisions made according to the circumstances. The field data revealed that some respondents remained passive in certain instances and were neglectful in others, all of which are part of their form of resistance, an '*everyday form of resistance*.' Some respondents believe that being introverted and not actively engaging in certain situations in order to avoid being

⁷⁶The State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of Kerala implements the Kudumbashree programme for poverty eradication and women's empowerment. 'Kudumbashree' means 'family prosperity' in Malayalam. It provides financial and technical assistance to programmes that promote economic and social development. Through women empowerment programmes, the mission also strives to improve women's citizenship and agency. Kerala's 'Kudumbashree' is distinctive in many aspects. It is India's largest women's SHG. On May 17, 1998, the Kerala government established a special poverty alleviation initiative for underprivileged women. *Kudumbashree* became the 'State Poverty Eradication Mission' after being legally registered.

noticed is also a form of resistance. Additionally, they revealed that if they interacted more actively, people would make comments about them, such as ‘overly active in the absence of husband’ and other such things, so they would remain silent and passive to avoid being on the receiving end of unpleasant comments from others.

Like passivity, visibility is considered a strategic or intentional act. The term ‘visibility’ referred to here points to the visibility of men in the home or creates the impression that men are home. Many Left-behind wives mentioned, and I have personally witnessed, that they place the chappals of men where they generally keep their chappals of everyone, such as near the front door, to give the impression that men are home. Many respondents made strategic choices concerning their husbands’ absence; they were aware of the scenarios in which their husbands’ absence could have negative consequences for them and deliberately avoided those situations while faking in those situations. Such strategic choices regarding their husbands’ absence in the homeland seemed to be recognised as more necessary for the Left-behind wives in order to avoid some unfavourable experiences, assault and robbery. In addition, many Left-behind wives conceal their identities and use strategies to mask their identities on certain occasions. Besides that, Left-behind wives used to tell strangers (such as vendors of vegetables, fruits, crockery and other items who are not regular hawkers in that area) that their husband would arrive soon, that he usually arrived around this time, or that their husband would arrive home in the evening, all of which gave the impression that their husband was at home and would go to a nearby job. But the exciting part is that most of these talks occur without the vendors asking any questions.

In addition, breaking the silence about atrocities against the Left-behind wives has been a potent source of resistance for the Left-behind wives of any kind of abuse because it focuses not only on the abuser but also on the greater structural violence perpetrated against the Left-behind wives as a consequence of stereotypical perceptions about them as vulnerable people in society, particularly sexually vulnerable people. None of them had previously reported it to the authorities or notified anyone about the atrocities they had experienced. These days people have begun to file complaints at the police station or at least to their friends and family. This openness about their experiences may vary depending on the multiple factors that affect the individual.

Furthermore, some of them stated that they have gradually developed a “never mind” attitude toward their surroundings, particularly when it comes to undesirable rumours and

accusations resulting from their children's influence. Sajida, one of the respondents, reported that their daughter is always boosting with energy and that she continually reminds her to ignore the nasty comments from the people around her. This sheds light on her daughter's education and upbringing, which helped them to avoid unwanted concerns. Another respondent stated that they share everything with their husband and keep him informed of her daily routines in order to avoid situations where he might get to know her whereabouts from elsewhere.

From the perspective of respondents, all of the aforementioned tactics and talks may fall under the umbrella of "infrapolitics." "Infrapolitics" is a key tactic used by many Left-behind wives. As part of this, they have used passivity and self-masking as coping strategies to manoeuvre their lifeworld. Even being silent and avoiding the problem or situation are their evasion tactics that come under "infrapolitics." The Left-behind wives might resort to covert tactics only in their personal spaces, which they might not want to reveal. Further, speaking up against the unfair treatment of the husband and his family, reporting any other assaults they have experienced to the cops and making the harassment public are all powerful ways of resistance for them. Nowadays, these acts of resistance have given them a social space where they can express themselves. Having said that, it is important to note that each person's resistance and reactions are influenced by their various intersecting identities.

Summary

The first section of this chapter focused on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the respondents' everyday lives, specifically with emotional aspects. The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown have had a variety of repercussions on the Left-behind wives' and their families daily lives. The lockdown brought an opportunity where many respondents stayed together with their husbands for the first time in their entire marital life; both the Left-behind wives and their children stayed together with their husband/father for a long for the first time. The lockdown period exacerbated women's workload while also causing structural changes such as gender roles being changed and household chores and childcare are being shared. All changes and reforms drew attention to a person's varied layers of intersections in society; the contextual background plays a detrimental role in it. Each person's Covid experiences vary depending on their multiple inclinations or intersections.

The processes of contestations, approaches and negotiations of the Left-behind wives form an important theme of this second section. Women are regarded as social beings capable of performing in life situations using tactics, negotiations, and disagreement. Domestic space plays a vital role in each tactic, negotiation, and contestation used by the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala. Each person's mode and depth of resistance and contestation are determined by the power that they wield. This power may come from their socioeconomic background and their multiple orientations. The power they possess determines each person's mode and intensity of resistance and contestations. Even the challenges and resistance to patriarchal culture vary from individual to individual, depending on their economic background, method of residence, sect, age, and other factors. My respondents came from various backgrounds, including classes, ages, educational qualifications, and occupations. As a result, their everyday forms of resistance are also based on that, and their coping strategies pointed to emphasise their intersectionalities, such as power dynamics within the family, society, socio-economic background, and other distinct multiple orientations. Even the way people perceive things and react to particular circumstances differs between a person from a well-established family and a woman from a lower-income household. Any action, reaction, or resistance towards anything depends on each person's inclinations, socio-economic background, social location, and other intersectionalities. The said intersectional elements influence infrapolitics.

The second half of this chapter focused on how Left-Behind wives in Malabar handled and dealt with the issues they faced on a daily basis, which were also shaped by the relationships between partners, the power dynamics within the family, and their social position. In this way, I suggest that the Left-behind wives create their own active spaces in this patriarchal culture. They compromised and showcased courage and flexibility when confronted in public spaces. Further, an exploration of the methods, negotiations and contestations used by the Left-behind wives in various situations adds a significant dimension to existing scholarship.

Chapter VI

Summary, Findings and Conclusion

In Kerala, Gulf migration for employment is overwhelmingly male-dominated. Many people from Kerala, specifically from the northern parts, migrated to the Middle Eastern countries in the early 70s, which strengthened the international ties between India and Gulf countries as much as the regional (cultural and religious) ties between Malabar and the Gulf countries. In this thesis, I have attempted to analyze a new social phenomenon that occurred in Malabar as a result of the rampant male migration to Gulf countries. The widespread exodus of married men resulted in the emergence of a new group of people known as the 'Left-behind wives' in Malabar. The studies so far have limited their focus to the socio-economic mobility of these women in the absence of their husbands; diverging from this, I have attempted to examine their lifeworld by giving importance to factors like emotions and technology from an intersectional framework. I have strived to comprehend and interpret the experiences of the Left-behind wives in Malabar from their own standpoint. I was able to discern the power play and the resultant subjugation, along with their strategies of resistance through their narratives. It is to be noted that, while focusing on the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives in Malabar, the studies so far have ignored the multiple identities, power dynamics within the family and various other experiences, including their emotional experiences and life after the advancement of communication technology. Thus, this research receives significant prominence.

My initial target was to demonstrate the experiences that the Left-behind wives face within the traditional divisions of gender and religion and the intersections related to their lives that have not been fully captured whilst analyzing their vulnerabilities. However, the task of analysing their experiences is rendered meaningless without paying proper attention to the nuanced intersections that make up their lives. The impact of male migration on the lives of the Left-behind wives cannot be considered an opportunity or a risk factor. The interpersonal relationship between the spouses is one of the most crucial aspects that determine whether male out-migration involves risk or opportunity. Their varied orientations, socio-economic background, and other intersectionalities determine whether it is a peril or an opportunity for them. Under this context of the discussion, I underlined the significance of accounting for multiple identities while analysing the construction of the social world, not just constraining it to the intersection of religion and gender. Analyzed in

that sense, each experience of the Left-behind wives is unique due to the interrelated categories like class, sect, age, education, occupation of the husband, type of family, locality and others.

Women, in their daily life, deal with many axes of social division, including gender, religion, sect, age, dis/ability and class, all of which are interlinked. Social axes for division are entangled. Analysing their experiences through an intersectional lens gives a better understanding of their lives. The empirical data from the field stands witness to the favourable and unfavourable effects of male migration on the Left-behind wives. The majority of the Left-behind wives realise that their life in the absence of their husband, which is marked by recurrent transgressions of social, emotional, and cultural barriers, is an experience that causes fear, uncertainty, and emotional problems. Depending on society's context and social conventions, men's migration can positively and negatively affect women's empowerment and autonomy.

Previous scholarships talked about women's female headship and autonomy due to men's migration, but most of these studies ignored the contextual and cultural customs and traditions specific to each household, community and society. There is a culturally acceptable or socially appropriate meeting spot for women and children to express their hopes and concerns, which has an implicit boundary in every family, community, and society. By looking at the everyday life of the Left-behind wives in Malabar, one can understand how patriarchal culture affects the interpersonal relationships between individuals, the individual and society, which have been omitted in the existing set of literature. Thus, in the second chapter, titled *Left-behind Wives: Culture, Gender and Media*, I focused on how Malabar's cultural context produces patriarchal prescriptions in society. The chapter is a demonstration of how the cultural influences in northern Kerala 'enable' and 'restrain' the wives whom their partners- the gulf migrants, leave behind. It starts by showing the role of family and marriage, the two most significant social institutions in an already patriarchal society, the formation and perpetuation of 'women' and 'men' in general, and the Left-behind wives, specifically in the Malabar region.

The chapter has explained how social institutions such as family and marriage have played the role of carriers of cultural components in general and have been crucial in transmitting the gendered culture. The gender sensibilities and dynamics in Malabar, like in any other space, are a result of the socialization process. The chapter stresses how the media and literature contribute to the making of gendered culture and act as secondary agents of socialisation. In order to obtain a

more comprehensive insight into the society's cultural history and narratives, it needs to be looked at how the Left-behind wives are represented in media, notably in 'Home cinema'. The 'Home cinema' released in the 2000s, widely watched and entertained by the Malabar Muslims inside their houses, makes up a significant case with regard to the Left-behind wives and their social stereotyping. I end the chapter by focussedly looking at various ways in which the 'home cinema' depicted the everyday life of the Malabar Muslims with a special focus on migration and narrated the complex social-emotional lives of the migrant men and their Left-behind wives. I argue in this chapter that media, literature and discourses, particularly the home cinemas have a crucial role in producing and perpetuating the Left-behind wives as 'sexually thirsty and accessible' women.

In addition to their long separation from their migrant husbands and the consequent physical-social-emotional vulnerability, the social gaze that depicts them as 'sexually vulnerable' or 'sexually deviant' brings many emotional dynamics into their lives. This form of social subordination/social exclusion of the Left-behind wives stands true despite the 'economic mobility' they earned in the absence of their husbands. In short, the second chapter discusses the complex life of the Left-behind wives in the social and regional set-up of Malabar; the husbands' absence makes it their obligation to take up more familial and social responsibilities in addition to the usual household activities. The deprivation of the physical/sexual needs for a prolonged period, followed by their presentation in media and literature, especially in 'home cinemas' as potential transgressors, along with their subjection in the social gaze as the 'sexually thirsty and accessible' has done its part in destroying the social image of the Left-behind wives. Having explained the complexity of their life, I try to analyse the emotional landscape of the Left-behind wives in the next chapter.

The third chapter, titled *Emotions and Experiences: The Social Landscape of the Left-behind wives*, theorises the complex experiences of the Left-behind wives mainly through the lens of the sociology of emotion. At the outset, the chapter looked at the trajectory and development of the emerging branch in academia, i.e., sociology of emotion and then moved towards showcasing how the socio-cultural contexts, especially the gender-based socialisation and gender-sensibilities, determine the formation of emotions, emotional dynamics and emotional expressions. The emotionality of women and men has always been associated with society's cultural stereotypes and gender expectations. That is to say that the socio-cultural context plays a significant role in

making gender stereotypic socialisation and the emotional expressivity of each person. The chapter has recorded the Left-behind wives' narratives to obtain multiple views on their emotional experiences. In everyday experiences, society plays a critical role in forming and describing emotions. The emotional variance is determined by a person's social status and power; as carriers of cultural elements in society, media and literature also stimulate emotions. The 20th century saw a rise in the emotional connectedness in long-distance relationships which resulted from the proliferation of communication technologies. We have become techno-human beings. The advancement of technological infrastructure, including communication technologies, plays a vital role in the transnational relationship between migrant husbands and the Left-behind wives. Spouses use technological devices in order to make an intimate connection, including sexual gratification. However, the usage of technological devices among men and their Left-behind wives is ambivalent in nature. The following chapter discusses how technology and gender extend surveillance on the Left-behind wives.

The fourth chapter, titled *Technology and Gender: Surveillance on the Left-behind Wives*, presents the role of modern technology in the lives of the wives of Gulf migrants. Globalisation and modernisation have made way for easy accessibility of modern communication technologies, which impacted the lives of both migrant husbands and the Left-behind wives significantly. The new communication patterns generate a sense of emotional closeness and lessen the emotional and geographical disruptions. Emerging communication systems have created a virtual world in which they can engage freely and privately, allowing family bonds to be strengthened across large distances and boundaries. As a result, ICTs serve a critical role in maintaining transnational linking ties and assuring their well-being. This chapter also deals with the positive and negative experiences of the Left-behind wives with regard to modern technology and devices. The use of modern technology in everyday life routines in a virtual patriarchal society has a paradoxically equal significance. The patriarchal system uses modern technology to coerce or persuade people, especially women. The remittances received from male out-migration have an impact on women's empowerment and disempowerment. People who install CCTV and other security systems are primarily those who receive greater remittances. The data from the field indicates that in certain cases, Modern technologies, specifically smartphones and CCTV, have been used to monitor the mobility of the Left-behind wives in Malabar. The idea of facilitating safety through surveillance has become increasingly complicated, predominantly when safety operates in/through the

relationship of power, such as the one between a husband and wife. Here, patriarchy, under the pseudonym of security, carries out various forms of control and restrictions on mobility and socialisation. As a result, the Left-behind wives have to inform each and everything to their husbands, and I have noted from the field that this ICT-based co-presence acted as a double-edged weapon in their routines. Here, I do not attempt to negate the constructive roles and experiences of modern technology in relation to the Left-behind wives; instead, I attempt to reveal the neglected aspect of modern technology, the form of “mediated patriarchy” that is in operation. Despite having patriarchy in action, everyone employs “everyday forms of resistance” to subvert the domination of power used against them in one way or the other.

The fifth chapter analyses diverse acts of negotiations and resistances wherein agency and subjectivity are not solely restricted to the production of counter-subjectivities; the chapter examines the everyday forms of resistance that the Left-behind wives in Malabar used against the experiences of subjugation that they undergo. It focuses on the contestations, methods, and negotiations that the Left-behind wives undertake. Women are viewed as social beings who can perform in real-life situations by employing strategies, negotiation, and rejection. It explored how the Left-behind wives’ everyday forms of resistance, which are covert, ordinary, unstructured, and opposing in many different ways to dominance and power. Each technique, negotiation, and contestation utilised by the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala relies heavily on domestic space. The method and depth of each person’s resistance and contestation are defined by the power they possess. Their socioeconomic background and varied orientations may be the source of their authority. In this sense, I propose that in this patriarchal culture, the Left-behind wives constructed their own active spaces, making compromises and demonstrating courage and flexibility. Individuals’ struggles and resistance to patriarchal culture differ depending on their socioeconomic background, type of residence, sect, age, and other variables.

Also, this chapter analyses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives and their families through the lens of the sociology of emotion. The coronavirus pandemic and ensuing lockdown brought about severe consequences for the Left-behind wives and their families in their daily lives. Many respondents were able to stay with their husbands for the first time in their married lives during the lengthy lockdown. The lockdown heightened women’s burden while also producing structural changes such as shifting gender stereotypes,

including sharing household responsibilities and childcare. All modifications and reforms attracted attention to the individuals' diverse layers of societal intersections; the contextual background has a significant function in this. Depending on their various inclinations or intersections, each person's covid experiences differ.

Perhaps my social position influenced my decision to pursue this research topic; my social location plays an important role in whatever 'knowledge' that I produce. Thus, I consider myself responsible for the actions and results I observed in the due course of this research. I have also seriously thought about whether my presence as a researcher has caused the subjects to act differently in comparison to when he or she is with persons he or she knows better. It is crucial to take into account my position as a researcher because such nuanced dynamics can happen unintentionally. Additionally, even though I am not a 'Left-behind wife' in my native place, it was challenging for me during the fieldwork to distinguish between the emic and etic perspectives from the field because I am a member of the Mappila community. However, I can claim to be a sort of Left-behind wife as I am pursuing research in Hyderabad, which requires me to stay away from my husband. But the most substantial variation I have observed between myself and them is that I have been staying on a central university campus, far away from my relatives, friends, and neighbours of my hometown. The 'space' in which my respondents and I live differ vastly, and the space plays a key role in shaping interpersonal dynamics and behavioural patterns. A close comparison with my respondents brings in anonymity along with the space on the ground.

Additionally, I made a note of each narrative's circumstances, sociocultural context, and explanations for my analysis. Any risk or choice we make on a daily basis, I contend, is contingent on our manifold, intertwined identities. I have understood the significance of accounting for multiple orientations/identities while analysing the construction of the social world, which should not be limited to the intersection of religion and gender. Finally, I want to point out that this study is insufficient to make broad generalisations. The findings cannot be generalised; intersectionality is crucial unless it reveals conflicting conclusions.

Left-behind Muslim wives have been facing triple exclusion as women, Muslim women and Left-behind women due to the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim women as meek, backward, and victims of oppression in society. Muslim women have long been stereotyped as backwards in the media and literature, and 'home cinema' portrays Gulf wives in a derogatory way. Gulf wives

are portrayed as sexually vulnerable, indulging in sexual liaisons in 'home movies.' The major stereotypes that the Left-behind wives face are sexual assaults and allegations of infidelity. Even the allegations of sexual assault against them were contingent on the presence of male guardians at home in the absence of the husband, such as a brother, father, and father-in-law. It also depends on other critical variables such as their family's socio-economic status, the women's physical appeal, etc. As discussed in the third chapter, power and status are crucial in making an impression on others. As a result, people make a bad impression on the Left-behind wives who do not belong to the upper class and highly influential families in terms of their economic and societal status. The community adopts a different attitude towards powerful and powerless people.

Among the 124 respondents, 90 (73%) believe that their husband's relocation has left them mentally exhausted, and 34 (27%) believe that they are more at ease when their husband is away and less at ease when he is at home. As I delved deep, I realised that those 34 respondents are constantly scared of their husbands while he is at home. Nine of the 34 respondents claimed that their spouses had physically abused them for trivial reasons and had become angry when they were compared to other males in their houses. In comparison to other men in their houses, 21 out of the 34 respondents reported that their husbands had physically assaulted them for insignificant reasons. Their spouses claim that they have an unpredictable and domineering attitude and that even their parents and siblings raise caution while conversing with them. The other 13 respondents never mentioned the physical assaults; however, they kept talking about their husbands' verbal abuse and humiliation in front of other family members. Besides that, out of these 13, five disclosed sexual abuse from partners. I finally understood that the dynamics between partners play a crucial role in determining whether men's presence at home is a bane or boon for the wives. However, none of the 34 respondents ever downplayed the issues and challenges they experienced from society as the Left-behind wives.

It is observed that most of the Left-behind wives who stay away from their husbands in their native countries due to their husbands' migration for employment must deal with various complexities and challenges, including social surveillance, a state of decreased mental security and a lack of adequate mobility for their preferences and conveniences. Moreover, I understood from the field that, during the time of the husbands' migration, the left-behind family is dependent on close friends and family, other kin, acquaintances, and neighbours; this dependence varies

according to the sex and age of the children. Having a boy child of at least 14 years old is desirable due to the cultural supremacy vested upon boys in Malabar. Having a girl child above the age of 18 with her Left-behind family does not appear to be a viable option for avoiding this dependence; the auto-ethnographic elements support this. The dependence and attitude of the neighbours and other relatives towards the Left-behind wives have an important link which implies a considerable difference in attitudes towards the Left-behind wives depending on the sex and age of the children; for example, people assume that if they have a boy, he can care for his mother. When it comes to a girl, however, societal expectations are different, and they begin to stare at them and seem suspicious whenever anyone visits their house. Neighbours will be consciously aware of who is coming to see them at their homes. Rather than their husbands' absence, several informants claimed that cultural attitudes made them more susceptible and miserable. Because of societal charges, some of them have cursed their husbands; according to them, the majority of the problems are caused by the absence of their husbands, without whom they feel like widows.

The study also observed and found out that the Left-behind wives are in a 'new form of widowhood' due to the physical absence of their husbands, even in this digital era. Communication technology has expanded due to the digital boom, and the Left-behind wives and migrant husbands now have more opportunities to express their feelings and exchange information via advanced technologies. Emerging communication systems have created a virtual world in which we can engage freely and privately, allowing family bonds to be strengthened across large distances and boundaries. As a result, ICTs serve a critical role in maintaining transnational linking ties and assuring their well-being. Furthermore, very few studies examining the influence of modern communication technologies on the lives of the Left-behind wives have been carried out; hence, this research is relevant. In addition, in addition to this, the widespread presence of the phone, as well as the perpetual expectation of being called up, has led to the use of modern technical equipment as a double-edged tool in the lives of the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala. The routinised use of sophisticated technology in daily life in a virtualised patriarchal society is quite paradoxical as well as equally significant. The patriarchal system employs sophisticated technology to control or influence people. For their family's safety, several husbands installed CCTV, which they also used to keep an eye on their family's whereabouts. CCTV cameras are now invading intimate spaces and violating people's privacy. In short, CCTV cameras play a dual role in their lives, enabling and restricting the mobility of the Left-behind wives. The male

migration into the Gulf countries enables a ‘smart-home’ environment in the majority of the homes in Malabar. According to the narratives of some the Left-behind wives in Northern Kerala, they have come to hate and even fear the virtual presence of their husbands that these technologies offer. In a certain way, smartphones and CCTV, in particular, have become dubious tools used against the Left-behind wives in Malabar. In the globalised contemporary patriarchal society, most the Left-behind wives are virtually monitored. Thus, in the last chapter, I have provided a detailed description of how the Left-behind wives compromised, negotiated, and resisted the social world in the virtual patriarchal societies that impinge on their personal lives, as well as unravelled the significance of their everyday struggles and social manoeuvring. Based on this rich ethnography of the Left-behind wives in northern Kerala, I have also examined the Left-behind wives’ approaches to fighting off various forms of dominance and the various forms of resistance, which are frequently covert and invisible. Everybody used their ‘infra politics’ to manage their life situations in society. Field data indicate that the Left-behind wives have also been using “infra politics,” subtle means of defiance, to maintain their warmth and stability in the cultural society. As James Scott noted, everyone resists and confronts the situation, and each one resistance is unique since each person’s social background and experiences are unique. Intersections of each person’s identities impact their defiance/resistance in the same way as their challenges do.

The Left-behind wives confront the challenges of dealing with social, cultural and economic tensions and conflicts due to the women-headed household, challenges stemming from the cultural history of Malabar. The added responsibilities caused them numerous problems, owing to the cultural background of Malabar, which prioritises men. Even though whatever power men have over women in this patriarchal society, women have managed to subvert that power in other ways. Thus, this research perceived women are social beings with the power to act in life situations using tactics, dialogues, and oppositions. The form and extent of each person’s defiance (resistance) and contestation are defined by the power they possess. The Left-behind wives experience an intersection of oppression and privilege based on gender, religion, class and other social factors. Also, the Left-behind wives themselves have the most suitable view of understanding their marginalised status and the privileged situation in their lifeworld. Previous research has shown the complexities of the impact of men’s migration on women’s status. However, I claim that various factors, including the type of household, the husband’s remittances, sect, age, and sex of children, educational qualifications, and others, play a role because everyone

has a unique social field and set of experiences. Therefore, a person's intersecting identities shape and reshape their life situation and gender relations in the public sphere.

While referring to the intersectional standpoint of feminist discourse, I also urge the readers to keep a broader mind to read this far from the context of the regular Eurocentric understanding of feminism. One needs to go beyond the dichotomization of the liberal v/s the secular to locate the subjects in the study, where culture plays an important role in the making of the individual agency. An intersectional framework enables me to read and identify the six core factors of social inequality, power, relationality, complexity, social context and social justice in relation to the matrix elements of interpersonal, structural, disciplinary and cultural. I am able to bring up the intricacies that are woven into the lives of the Left-behind wives from the trajectory of gender, emotion and technology. The element of praxis that the field opens, conjoined with the theoretical understanding of feminist epistemological standpoints, allowed for the formation of a synergy between them. Throughout the thesis, the attempt is to steer clear of the dichotomy between theory and praxis, thereby making efforts to unite them through an intersectional framework.

Having said all these, one should be wary of the fact that this study focuses on the nuanced aspects of the lifeworld of the Left-behind wives; whose husbands have migrated to the middle east for employment purposes, which should be read in the cultural context of the northern Malabar. A blind generalization of the findings of this study to a different context is strongly discouraged. The experiences of the women in this particular study stand true with respect to the particular life situations that the socio-political-economical cultural, and geographical landscape of northern Malabar provides. Theory and praxis in gender studies include the points such as there is no monolithic gender and no universal gender concerns. The research implies that Muslim women have completely different gender theory and praxis from that of the Western liberal white women in Europe. The women, their sexuality and piety, as well as men, all have to be studied with due respect and recognition of cultural/religious factors.

Limitations of the Study

The research on the Left-behind Muslim wives in Malabar, while located in the South Asian scholarship, opens up fresh possibilities for a study, despite having a range of constraints. This required me to think and reflect on the various terminologies (both academic and colloquial) and

field experiences in order to decipher the meanings produced in the specific society. Conducting research in a field in which you were born and brought up fetches you both pros and cons. The primary aspect arises from familiarity, where most of the faces around you are known ones. Having a genuine conversation with those known faces was a challenging task for me during the initial days as I was related to many of them in one way or the other. They are reluctant to express their emotions in front of me as, for them, I am still their child. Being an insider and outsider always provides its own advantages and disadvantages for the research. During the initial stage, some of them did not even speak a single word about their life experience when they got to know that I was studying their lived experiences. They do not want it to be documented, and the initial interaction was always limited to a monosyllable answer towards the questions posed. This raised a concern about the accuracy of the data obtained.

Another problem during the course of fieldwork that I faced was the partial restriction imposed in the presence of the gatekeepers-elders, who, with their intimidating presence, tried to influence the responses of the respondents/informants during the interviews. I have explained how the presence of the mother-in-law gave the daughter-in-law jitters. My identity of being a wife cum scholar who is staying away from their husband for the purpose of pursuing higher education also led to some unpleasant encounters, as I was judged for not staying with my husband and taking care of him. The open commentary was followed by cold- judgmental stares and vice-versa. Additionally, questions about my chastity also cropped up in some places. This eventually created a roadblock in my early interaction with my respondents and their respective families. The researcher in me takes the lead to block any forms of prejudices, judgements and stereotypes against the subject of study. In essence, contextualizing and historicizing the facts aided my analysis to a great extent, but it still left many unexplained concerns.

The methodological limitations of the study are relevant. Any study of qualitative nature stands subject to the condition of not being generalizable. The qualitative approach is relevant for this study to understand the lived experiences of the Left-behind wives. This helps to critically analyze the intricacies in each respondent's life, which the qualitative studies fail to capture regarding methodological fundamentalism.

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Appendix -1

A Call to Travel- A Poem by Imam As-Shafi'ee

There is no rest in residence for a person of culture
and intellect, so travel and leave where you're residing!
Travel! You will find a replacement for what you have left.
And strive! The sweetness of life is in striving!

I've seen that water stagnates if still
becomes pure if it runs, but not if it doesn't flow
If the lion doesn't leave his den he cannot hunt,
and the arrow will not strike without leaving its bow

If the sun stood still in its heavenly course
then people, Arab and non-Arab, it would bore
Gold dust is as the earth where commonly found,
and in its land, oud is but another wood in store

If one travels, he becomes sought out
If one travels, he is honoured like gold.

(See the link: <https://shariahweb.wordpress.com/2013/05/25/a-call-to-travel-a-poem-by-imam-imam-as-shafiee/>)

Appendix-2

In chapter three, I have cited the poem 'Duabai Kathupattu' written by S.A Jameel.

Dubai Kathupattu

എത്രയും ബഹുമാനപ്പെട്ട എന്റെ പ്രിയ ഭർത്താവ് വായിക്കുവാൻ സ്വന്തം ഭാര്യ എഴുതുന്നെന്നെന്നാലേറെ പിരിശത്തിൽ ചൊല്ലീടുന്നു വസ്ത്രലാം.

എഴുതി അറിയിക്കാൻ കാര്യങ്ങൾ നൂറുണ്ട്,

എഴുതുകയല്ലാതെ വേറെന്തു വഴിയുണ്ട്

എൻ മിഴികൾ തൂകും കണ്ണുനീർ അതുകണ്ട് എൻ കരൾ വേദന കാണുവാനാരുണ്ട്

എങ്ങനെ ഞാൻ പറയും എല്ലാമോർത്ത് എന്നെന്നും ഞാൻ കരയും ഈ കത്തിന് ഉടനടി ഒരു മറുപടി തന്ന് സങ്കടം തീർത്തീടണേ ഇടക്കിടെ എന്നെയും ഓർത്തീടണേ.

മധുവിധു നാളുകൾ മനസ്സിൽ കഴിയുന്നു, മദന കിനാവുകൾ മാറോടണക്കുന്നു, മലരണി രാത്രികൾ മഞ്ഞിൽ കുളിക്കുന്നു, മണിയറ കട്ടിലു മാടിവിളിക്കുന്നു, എങ്ങനെ ഞാനുറങ്ങും, കിടന്നാലും എങ്ങനെ ഉറക്കം വരും, ഉറങ്ങിയാലും മധുപകർന്നിടും പുതു പുതു സ്വപ്നങ്ങൾ കണ്ട് തെട്ടിയുണരും, തലയിണ കൊണ്ട് കെട്ടിപ്പുണരും.

പൊന്നുമുതലും പണം പണ്ടം പർദീസും ഫോറിൻ തൂണികളണിഞ്ഞുള്ള പത്രാസും, നാലു പേർ കാണെ നടിക്കുന്ന നാമുസും, നാട്ടിലേറ്റവും വലിയ ഒരു വീടിന്റെ അന്തസും ഉണ്ടെനിക്ക് സകലം, എല്ലാമെല്ലാം ഉണ്ടായിട്ട് എന്ത് ഫലം അനാഥയായി, ഇടതുടയറ്റ ഗുണ മണമുള്ള പെൺമലരായി വിരിഞ്ഞ്, വിരഹത്തിൻ വെണ്ണീരായി വെന്തിരിഞ്ഞെ...

രണ്ടു നാലു വർഷം മുൻപ് നിങ്ങൾ വന്ന്, എട്ടോ പത്തോ നാളുകൾ മാത്രം വീട്ടിൽ നിന്ന്, അതിലുണ്ടായ ഒരു കുടഞ്ഞിന് ഇന്ന് മൂന്നു വയസായിന്ന്, അവനെന്നും ചോദിക്കും ബാപ്പ എവിടെന്ന്, ഓടിച്ചാടി കളിക്കും മോൻ ബാപ്പാണെ മാടി മാടി വിളിക്കും, അതു കാണുമ്പോൾ ഉടഞ്ഞും ഇട നെഞ്ചു പിടഞ്ഞീടും പൂക്കുഞ്ഞി പൈതലല്ലേ, ആ മുഖം കാണാൻ പുതി നിങ്ങൾക്കുമില്ലേ...

എൻ പ്രിയ മാരൻ ഈ ദുനിയാവിനക്കരെ, തേങ്ങി കരഞ്ഞ് തുടിക്കും ഞാൻ ഇക്കരെ, ഇടയിലെ ഖല്ബുപോൽ അലറും കടൽത്തീര, ഈ

ജീവിതം വെറും നരകാഗ്നി താഴ്വര, എന്തിനു ജീവിക്കുന്നു, നിങ്ങളീ തീയിലിട്ടെന്നെ വേവിക്കുന്നു, വില്ലമ്പേറ്റു ചിറകൊടിഞ്ഞൊരു ചെറു കുരുവിയായി മണ്ണിൽ വീണു പതിച്ചു, പാവം പെണ്ണ് എന്നെ വിധി ചതിച്ചേ...

അന്ന് നാം മധുരം നുകർന്നൊരു മണിയറ, ഇന്ന് ഞാൻ പാർക്കും തടങ്കൽ തടവറ, മണവാട്ടിയായി വന്ന് കയറിയൊരീ കുര, മനം മോഹങ്ങൾ കൊന്നു കുഴിച്ചിട്ട കല്ലറ, കണ്ണീരിന് പുവിരിഞ്ഞേ, കദന കടലിൽ ഖൽബ് കത്തി കരിഞ്ഞേ, കര കാണാതെ കുടുങ്ങിടും നടുക്കടലിടുക്കിൽ ഞാൻ നീന്തി നീന്തി തുടിക്കും,

അങ്ങനെ ഞാൻ നീറി നീറി മരിക്കും.

മധുരം നിറച്ചൊരു മാംസപൂവൻ പഴം മറ്റാർക്കും തിന്നാൻ കൊടുക്കൂല ഒരിക്കലും, മരിക്കുവോളം ഈ നീതി കാക്കും ഞാൻ എങ്കിലും മലക്കല്ലെ ഞൻ ഒരു പെണ്ണ് എന്ന് ഓർക്കണം നിങ്ങളും,

യൗവനത്തെ കൊഴിഞ്ഞു പതിനേഴിന്റെ പൂവനാം പൂ പൊഴിഞ്ഞു, കാരുണ്യത്തിൽ കടഞ്ഞെടുത്തപ്പോ കുടമോടുവിൽ ഞാൻ കാഴ്ചപണ്ടം മാത്രമായി, ഉഴിഞ്ഞിട്ട നേർച്ചക്കോഴി പോലെയായി....

അറബിപ്പൊന്ന് വിളയും മറുമണൽ കാട്ടിൽ അകലെ അബുദാബി ഗൾഫിന്റെ നാട്ടിൽ അദ്ധ്വാനിക്കും നിങ്ങൾ സൂര്യന്റെ ചോട്ടിച്ച്, അനുഭവിയ്ക്കാൻ ഞാനും കുട്ടിയും ഈ വീട്ടില്, ഞാനൊന്ന് ചോദിക്കുന്നു, ഇക്കോലത്തിൽ നീന്ത് സമ്പാദിക്കുന്നു? ഒന്നുമില്ലെങ്കിൽ തമ്മിൽ കണ്ടുമുട്ടും നമ്മൾ രണ്ടുമൊരു പാത്രത്തിൽ ഉണ്ണാമെല്ലോ, ഒരു പായി വിരിച്ച് ഒന്നിച്ചുറങ്ങാമെല്ലോ..

കത്തു വായിച്ചുടൻ കണ്ണുനീർ വാർക്കേണ്ട, കഴിഞ്ഞു പോയതിനി ഒന്നുമീ ഓർക്കേണ്ട, ഖൽബിൽ കദനപ്പു മാലുങ്ങൾ കോർക്കേണ്ട,

കഴിവുള്ള കാലം കഴിഞ്ഞീനി തീർക്കേണ്ട, യാത്ര തിരിക്കുമല്ലോ, എന്നിക്കാമുഖം കണ്ടു മരിക്കാമല്ലോ, നിങ്ങൾക്കായി തട്ടിമുട്ടി കട്ടിൽ പട്ട് വിരിച്ച് അറ ഒന്നൊരുക്കീടട്ടെ, തല്ലാലം ഞാൻ കത്ത് ചുരുക്കീടട്ടെ.



RESEARCH ARTICLE



Transnational Relationships and Virtual Technology: An Ethnographic Study of the Left-behind Wives in Kerala

Nusarath Jahan P.

Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP), School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad, India

ABSTRACT

Modern technology plays a complicated role in (re)shaping the transnational relationships between migrated men and their left-behind wives in Kerala. Since the 1990s, the Malabar region in Kerala has witnessed large-scale migration of its workforce to the Gulf countries. As these women juggle between family, migration, and gaps in socio-economic development, multiple forms of technologies and surveillance complicate the institutionalization of patriarchy within the private sphere in the name of women's safety. Technological devices turn the migrants' wives into docile bodies, observable at any moment by their husbands' virtual eyes. This paper argues that using modern technology, which is operated around the idea of surveillance, migrant husbands foster a "mediated patriarchy." Further, modern technology (re)shapes transnational relationships and functions as a double-edged weapon in the left-behind wives' lives. Qualitative approaches and ethnography have been used to understand the demographic profile and personal experiences of the left-behind wives in Kerala.

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left-behind wives; virtual technology; mediated patriarchy; Kerala

Introduction

Studies in developmental sociology and economics have primarily assumed that economic development leads to social transformations and women's empowerment, while research in the Indian context shows a different finding. Scholars such as John et al. (2008) argue that economically developed states like Punjab and Haryana are reported to have the highest uneven sex ratios and instances of violence against women, including those perpetrated by the Khap Panchayat. Scholarship from the field of sociology of gender points to an inverse relationship between development and patriarchy (Datta, 2011; John et al., 2008). Development continuously engenders patriarchy, and those who exercise patriarchy co-opt the idea of development to suit their ends. Women have been inflicted with oppressive and exploitative relations over the years (Maseno & Kilonzo, 2011; Maynes & Garner, 1989). Often, unconditional submission

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