

Migration, Consumption and Gender: The Case of Rural Kerala

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Introduction

Development and progress, in contemporary understanding, is perceived to entail movement—largely physical, but sometimes also metaphorical. Movement denotes change, usually presumed to be positive and progressive. Thus, it might not be entirely coincidental that the development trajectory of communities with a record of progress and modernisation is linked to the experience of human migration across geographical boundaries, voluntary or forced. Migration, especially in traditional societies, has been perceived as challenging individual identities that are invariably bound by traditions and hierarchies—individuals breaking free from restricting spaces that have bound them (Devika 2005). The migrant, as an individual or as part of a group, also challenges ideas and abstractions such as nationhood and belonging, forcing the acknowledgement of the fragmented and fluidic nature of identities in the globalised world (Osella and Osella 2000).

The southern Indian state Kerala's experience with migration presents an interesting deviation from this trajectory. Migration to the Persian Gulf started following the discovery of oil in the 1960s, and continues to the present day. Initially it was in the form of unskilled, semi-skilled or illiterate male labourers; today, migrant workers from Kerala are from every shade of the skill spectrum of all genders. When the process of migration began, Kerala was still coming to terms with a crumbling agriculture sector and non-existent industrial manufacturing sector, and consequent high rates of poverty and unemployment. On one side, the country had freed itself from colonial rule, choosing a democratic form of government. The matrilineal family system, which was the norm for some major Hindu caste groups in Kerala, was legally abolished and the patriarchal nuclear family units were being projected as the new 'ideal' (Arunima 1995; Devika 2005). The independence movement had also given birth to socio-religious reform movements which aimed to bring about 'progress', doing away with the discriminatory caste system and ensuring that the 'new' nation had citizens equipped with 'qualities' befitting modern democracies whose 'progress' and 'success' depended largely on individual citizens.

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Around the same time, researchers stumbled upon a peculiarity about Kerala. Kerala, of course, had low indicators in terms of economic growth like GDP or per capita income. But it was found to rank very high in terms of non-economic indicators of growth such as educational attainment, rate of growth of population, and maternal and infant mortality rates. This was labelled the 'Kerala model' and would become the basis for Kerala's claim to fame in the decades to come (Kodoth and Eapen 2005; Radhakrishnan 2009). Migration contributed in no small measure to solidify and carry forward this trend. What is even more peculiar is that even after almost four decades of steady remittances from abroad, the manufacturing sector has not seen much improvement while the non-economic indicators remain at par with those of developed nations (Kodoth 2004).

The non-economic indicators like maternal mortality rate female, literacy etc. indirectly point to equity and gender justice. Thus, the Kerala model has been seen as an indicator of the high regard with which Kerala treats its women. As the trend of large-scale male migration from the state became more or less regular, it was automatically presumed by policymakers and researchers alike that women would take up leadership positions in the community while also becoming heads of family in the absence of menfolk, since they were already equipped with the educational qualifications (Gulati 1995). The promise of migration to deliver communities of underprivileged people out of restrictive hierarchical spaces into opportunity seemed to work perfectly until later feminist studies threw light on the deplorable rate of educated unemployment among Malayali women cutting across caste and class. Even state-sponsored surveys such as the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) found that Kerala women lagged behind their counterparts from states like Gujarat in terms of household decision-making and other indicators of female agency (Kodoth 2004). Later studies have consistently tried to underscore the fact that the seemingly linear narrative of development has overlooked the cause of entire social groups who are vulnerable and have faced discrimination for centuries, women featuring prominently among such groups. The gendered exclusion, researchers point out, has its roots in the social reform movements of the early twentieth century, which occurred as a corollary to the freedom movement (Devika 2005; Kodoth and Varghese 2012). A combination of colonial and Gandhian morals played an important role in fashioning the 'modern' public sphere of Kerala along gender lines while also attempting to revamp 'traditional' men and women to suit ideals of the 'modern self'. While the sense about traditional woman was that of a victim of oppressive practices, the modernising project did not foster considerable improvement in agency in them (Devika 2005; Devika and Thampi 2011).

This paper seeks to go beyond the oft-studied aspects of migration such as remittances and macroeconomic concerns. It looks at changes in consumption patterns consequent to the arrival of new capital through migration and their impact on gender. Kerala boasts a considerable population of female migrants which includes unskilled and skilled workers. The largest migrant group among them, the Malayali nurses, could be described

as a cultural entity with a remarkable presence across the globe (Kodoth and Varghese 2012). Still, even in Kerala, migration is largely imagined as a male adventure where the rapid increase in wealth and consumption has helped migrants form new identities in their land of origin. The paper examines migration in a village in Kerala to understand how changes in consumption patterns have worked to reinforce gender exclusion in newer ways, and how attempts at social and ritual mobility underlie such attempts. The transformation of the spaces of consumption to those that reinforce public morality and gendered social control while describing themselves as ‘modern’ is an interesting premise whereby to look at development modernity’s claims at liberation through ‘mobility’. Also striking is the failure of modernity to work through specific vulnerabilities like caste or, as in this case, gender and, thus, to address such inequalities.

The ethnography for the study was conducted at a village in Kerala called Anthikkad, and drinking spaces were used as the initial entry point to assess changes in consumption patterns. This is because toddy shops work as sites of socialisation while also being traditionally male-only spaces of leisure. The informants were patrons of toddy shops, the employees, toddy tappers and, gradually, their families, Gulf migrants and return migrants from the local community. The interviews were largely unstructured. Some interviews turned into informal group discussions especially when the site of the interview was a toddy shop or the home of an informant.

Migration and the Transformation of the Village

Changes in Drinking Patterns

The village chosen for fieldwork, Anthikkad, has a majority of Ezhavas, an erstwhile ‘untouchable’ or Dalit community who have traditionally been toddy tappers. It is also one of the caste groups which has benefitted greatly from Gulf migration. Drinking has been a part of Kerala culture, social and religious, and toddy, a fermented coconut drink, has been the traditional intoxicant, along with arrack, a stronger and more addictive drink. Menon (1995) has traced the history of drinking in Kerala from the late nineteenth century, analysing how different influences through different time periods contributed to making it a socially despised and taboo activity from its earlier egalitarian existence as an equaliser and enhancer of leisure. Since Kerala Hindu religious and cultural practices have differed from mainstream Hindu rituals, being connected more to pagan and agrarian rituals, the temple deities were made offerings of alcohol. Menon’s paper describes how upper-caste landlords shared space at local toddy shops with lower-caste workers, blurring caste and class differences, and how it was an everyday practice for women to consume alcohol with no stigma attached to the phenomenon. But the later socio-religious reformers, especially among the so-called ‘lower’ castes, equated these practices with the backwardness of the community. Consequently, they saw these as stumbling blocks to progress and modernity, which they hoped would bring about equality among the castes. The Ezhava community were urged to give up the ‘morally

degrading' work of toddy tapping by their spiritual leader Sree Narayana Guru. In hindsight, it paved the way for sanskritizing of the community. The family shrines stopped toddy offerings to the deities. Customs transformed to incorporate Vedic Brahminic rituals.

The state, on the other hand, encouraged drunkenness because arrack—a stronger brew and hence more addictive—was sold on license which brought revenue to the state (Menon 1995). However, the nationalist freedom movement also had an antagonistic attitude towards drinking because of the influence of Gandhian morality. Moreover, the promise of social mobility was a major influencing factor in adopting the new ideal of abstinence. Menon also describes how socialists tried to paint drinking as a vice practised by capitalist oppressors, thereby using transference to portray it as something to be given up or, rather, abhorred. It was later, when prohibition was enforced and thousands of toddy tappers found themselves thrown out of work and their unions banned, that the left parties understood their folly. The organised left still is, in theory, opposed to drinking but cannot afford to publicly criticise the *abkari* (liquor trade) industry.

The sites of nightlife in urban centres, where people go to unwind, are generally imagined to be frequented by younger, single people or (predominantly heterosexual) couples. In contrast, the conception of rural sites of drinking is as male-only places, where the population consists mostly of adult males. As such, the importance of such a space of consumption as a site of manufacturing and enacting masculinity cannot be ignored. Drinking is also one of the ways young boys are socialised to be 'men' (Guttman 1997). The study looks at how intertwined money and masculinity, and the performance of these two, are the integral subtext of drinking as a leisure activity while examining migration as an integral and overlooked subtext of the changes witnessed in drinking for leisure.

The time spent unwinding at the local toddy shop after work every day is a fascinating premise to look at male behaviour. The alcohol loosens up the burdens of masculinity and brings about the more sentimental aspects of participants' personalities, and consequently bonds the actors in a closely knit companionship/brotherhood, sometimes transcending outside world hierarchies and hegemonies. Although masculinity is played out in many different forms and sites in a given society, the importance of drinking spaces arises from the premise that masculinity and the idea of the alpha male depends considerably on being able to conform to certain norms while at the same time defying certain norms, drinking being one such activity. Looking at drinking in context, within the space of consumption, is also important because space is certainly not an innocent category; it forms an integral part of the act of consuming.

Although drinking is considered a somewhat accepted activity for a male in Indian society (Nisbett 2007), drunken behaviour is looked down upon. The toddy shops as

sites of male bonding are also indicative of a time when stricter social rules applied to socialising between the sexes; thus friendships or even general sociality was only permissible between people of the same sex and social standing. Guttman (1997) observes that excluding women from spaces and activities labelled as ‘masculine’ also works to contrast masculinity with femininity, thereby reinforcing the dichotomy.

To establish oneself as an ideal ‘masculine’, a person (usually a migrant) with liquidity often spends on drinking with friends and footing everyone’s bills while talking about ‘feminine conquests and drinking sessions in the Gulf’ (Osella and Osella 2000, 122). Thus, drinking, sometimes, even to the point of losing consciousness, is an activity that enhances masculine status in the community, although only people with money to spare are granted such excesses of luxury; on the other hand, gendered forms of social control forbid women from indulging in such acts. It was the migrants who introduced foreign liquor to the local drinking scene. It was consumed by friends and family members, at get-togethers following the return of the migrant home on leave. Exclusion of women from communal drinking perhaps started from this ritual, solidifying over the years. This drinking group of friends usually consists of men from different families and sometimes communities, and women might not have been part of such groups.

Another way in which Gulf migration impacted drinking and the drinking culture in Kerala was through its triggering of the construction boom in the state. Because migration coincided with the dissolving of joint families, many migrants built their own homes soon after migrating. In the 1970s and 80s, they were clearly identifiable because of their concrete structures and art deco design. Non-migrant elites also followed the trend, although their houses were not on the same scale as migrant homes. The 1990s saw a shift to traditional designs which imitated the designs of earlier feudal homes. Alcohol was served at every function related to the construction of a house, right from laying the foundation stone to the house-warming party. It was mainly intended for the labourers but all gathered menfolk took part in the ritual. The same was the case with marriages. Although initially restricted to migrants, the trend was picked up by the local elite and is now a recognised practice. A few older informants point out that inclusion of communal drinking as part of life cycle rituals has led to increasing alcohol dependency which is a well-documented state-wide phenomena.

The village of Anthikkad has toddy shops, a bar and a BEVCO (Kerala State Beverages Corporation Limited) outlet. While examining drinking practices of the selected village, it became obvious that toddy shops are past their days of glory and have been witnessing a steady decline in patronage, while BEVCO outlets and bars are running a largely profitable trade. As mentioned earlier, the population of the village is dominated by Ezhavas, the traditional toddy tappers, who have benefitted to a considerable extent from Gulf migration. Since the trend of Gulf migration started, toddy tapping has become a dying profession as many tappers migrated, some left the profession for better paying jobs like masonry or construction labour, and return migrants chose to not return to

toddy tapping. (Some wealthy Ezhava—and Christian—return migrants have procured bar licenses and run ‘bar hotels’.) Since the production was unable to meet demand, and arrack and ‘Indian made foreign liquor rose in popularity, toddy shops have become mostly unprofitable in villages which do not feature on the tourism map of Kerala. This is what has happened in Anthikkad as well. The existing toddy shops, in fact, have to ‘import’ toddy from neighbouring districts because there is not enough of it being tapped in the village.

The toddy shop clientele is mostly local, all known to each other as the village is not part of the tourist map and is away from the main commercial centres of the district. Those who visit the shop in the mornings typically do not consume toddy; they enter, read the day’s newspapers and chit-chat with the staff of the shop and other villagers who have gathered there. Drinking starts around noon and continues through late evening. The staff know the regulars and hardly any new customers come in because of the remote location of the village.

The all-male nature of these spaces was expected. Mornings were chosen for the initial set of interactions in the toddy shops. There was amusement at a woman’s interest in drinking, but I experienced no difficulties in interviewing people. But I was strongly discouraged from visiting bars for fieldwork although the BEVCO outlet was considered ‘safe’, provided I stuck to interviewing employees. This fact should provide a starting point for discussions regarding what drinking is to a Malayali. It is at once an entirely enjoyable pastime provided one is a male, but instantly a deplorable activity for a female. This should be compared and contrasted to Dileep Menon’s (1995) study which chronicles accounts from Kerala’s temple festivals in the early decades of the twentieth century where women from lower and higher castes alike could be found in an inebriated state; this makes it clear that drinking was not a taboo activity for women at that time. Women from toddy tapper families often work as cooks in the toddy shops. That is probably the only area that has the presence of women in the otherwise male-dominated industry of the liquor trade. Intoxication is thus an activity or, rather, an entitlement or a luxury available only to men. Surprisingly, none of the bars employed women as cooks and, in fact, women themselves reported being uncomfortable at the prospect of working in bars. The older women also observed that they do not drink or visit toddy shops or generally loiter near toddy shops during evenings. At other times, most of them source toddy for *appams*, a breakfast item, from toddy shops and are not apprehensive about doing so. (Sometimes their husbands and sons get it for them; women from better economic backgrounds possibly do not visit the shops to collect toddy for this purpose.) However, the women found it extremely uncomfortable to pass by the bars and the menfolk in the house forbade them from going near the bars in the evenings. Younger women reported being most uncomfortable about this aspect.

Another point worth mentioning is the location of the drinking sites. The bars are usually located in crowded junctions with commercial establishments and bus stops in close

proximity while toddy shops are usually located nearer residential areas. So it is ironical that women feel threatened when walking in a busy place but comparatively safer in more secluded spots. The drunken behaviour in crowded places is also ironic because public places are supposed to be 'formal'. While a sober woman feels uncomfortable about moving around in a crowded area, a drunk male feels perfectly comfortable about indulging in drunken antics in public. This has deeper significations with regard to spatial perspectives vis-à-vis gender. Further, it can be observed that the modernising of drinking in terms of sites has deprived women of traditional opportunities of work, replacing opportunity with stigma and also putting restrictions on mobility. It should be noted that the village has a negligible floating population apart from migrant labourers and people are generally known to each other. Spatial restrictions apply even when women are in familiar spaces. Exclusion works in strange ways in gendered public spaces.

The narratives of women around the toddy shops make it clear that even though they might be employed in the shop, drinking as a leisure activity is considered forbidden for them; all the women workers in toddy shops quickly denied any connection to drinking. This underlines the fact that, especially in recent times, sites of drinking are fashioned as highly gendered spaces, in a rural context. Apart from working as cooks, women only visit toddy shops (usually standing outside during the transaction) for the 'legitimate' activity of procuring material (toddy) to cook for the family, the expected and desired duty of a 'domestic' female. This is the case with women from toddy tapping families as well. Likewise, the near total absence of women from work in new bars can be attributed to two reasons: the change in the way the new sites of drinking are fashioned—as sites of male bonding which hostilely exclude women—as also the indoctrination of restrictive upper-class values in working-class women, inducting them into practices of upper-class femininity and keeping them away from work not considered 'respectable'. 'Subsuming of working class women under domestic ideologies' has occurred largely as a result of migration and resultant economic mobility, as has been evidenced in various studies (Devika and Thampi 2011, 1155).

A number of informants had strong opinions about women drinking and very reluctantly admitted that women used to drink during earlier times, but such 'bad' practices do not exist now; they also say that the 'modern' younger generation does not know how to drink in moderation because of influences such as cinema and the internet.

While the toddy shop employees interviewed were unhappy about the loss of business in toddy shops, they have accepted that modern young people with higher disposable income probably find the idea of going to a toddy shop not in keeping with their style. Strangely the villagers have accepted bars as a sign of progress even though they associate drunkenness, which is a non-virtue, with these exact spaces; this indicates that progress and modernity have become synonyms and come to stand for affluence. The new capital

and commodity culture heralded by neoliberal economic policies have seemingly appropriated modernity and progress to mean superficial purchasing power.

The argument that the paper puts forth, that the transformation of drinking habits has links to migration, should not take away from the fact that *kuppi*, or the bottle, was introduced in Kerala by the *pattalakkaran*, the soldier; the *gulfkaaran*, the Gulf migrant, bolstered the notions of alcohol-related masculinity engendered at the time. Until large-scale Gulf migrations started, the soldier was perhaps a Kerala village's only connection to the world outside and the *kuppi* signified his potency as a man of the world—in a sense, Malayali men's first brush with the alpha male. The *kuppi* was a ubiquitous presence in the soldier's rucksack. He regaled the village folk with his fantastical stories of wars and battles fought in faraway places; this aspect finds mention in literature and popular movies. But what the soldier lacked was economic agency. The Gulf migrant had no such issue. With money at his disposal, he became a clear masculine idol. Walsh (2011) observes how the masculine acts of providing for the family, taking risks and being adventurous and, in the process, bettering the self are central to the construction of a hegemonic migrant masculinity narrative. Consumption, or rather changes to it, was perhaps central to such a migrant experience. The migrant masculinity also reconstructs the non-migrant masculinities by reinforcing gender norms or weakening them.

Upward Mobility through Consumption

As noted above, the village has a sizeable number of out-migrants, and the affluence is visible in the new houses and cars. There is general consensus about the factors that lead people to migrate. There are no jobs to be found except in the government sector, agriculture has turned unprofitable. Interestingly, as we have seen, even when a toddy tapper returns home after a period of migration, he does not go back to toddy tapping or become an agriculturist and instead chooses to start business enterprises. Mostly, they do skilled work in an automobile or electronics workshop, which also fits the image of a 'modern' Malayali. Some informants also maintained that return migrants did not go back to farming for two reasons: the most important is that it is non-profitable and, second, the social anxiety of people thinking they were not successful enough as migrants to start a business. This holds true for all of Kerala, with migrant money only financing (apart from construction activity) lifestyle-based businesses like money lending, textile shops, hotels and restaurants, medical shops and, later, malls, private educational institutions and hospitals (Osella and Osella 2000; Radhakrishnan, 2009). Production-related activity like agriculture and industry is largely absent despite the fact that many migrants have struck gold as entrepreneurs in the Gulf and are now successful globally.

Some of the Ezhavas are now employed in the government sector, and have children who are doing engineering and management courses in cities like Bengaluru. There is

also a section of Ezhavas who have not received the benefits of migration or government reservations; the development discourse conveniently neglects these outliers, like many other social groups. These comparative inequalities deserve attention.

Gulf migration happened at a very significant moment in history, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this essay. Matriliney had been abolished, agriculture had turned unprofitable. With unemployment soaring and landholdings fragmented, migration was the only hope left for a young population in Kerala. Migration gave agency to the Malayali masculinity. I would also suggest that it transformed Malayali masculinity forever by replacing the emasculation felt by living under a matriarchal regime with economic power and social mobility. Migration brings about increased economic status, which in turn helps in solidifying social power and accelerating one's (and family's) progress in the social hierarchy.

Migration changed the Malayali material and consumer culture to a great extent (Osella and Osella 1999). This happened at two levels. The consumption pattern of migrant households changed because of the amount of money available for consumption and also because of the acquisition of consumer durables brought back by the migrants. At a second level, it prompted the non-migrant caste and class elite to copy these patterns of consumption. Although the non-migrants might not be able to afford imported gadgets of more expensive brands, they were possibly able to afford less expensive local brands. Kerala, thus, witnessed changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns much before liberalisation brought these changes to other parts of the country. Osella and Osella (1999) have studied the effects of consumption on social mobility in a village with a sizeable number of migrants from the Ezhava community. Among the Hindus, Nairs and Ezhavas are two communities who have benefitted the most from migration. The Kerala Brahmin community did not show much interest in amassing wealth by 'modern' methods and chose to stick to 'respectable' government jobs (Osella and Osella 1999). Nairs are historically a landowning upper caste while Ezhavas are an 'untouchable' 'lower' caste. But migration has helped the Ezhava community to acquire mobility from a social angle. Mobility within the caste hierarchy is not easy. Osella and Osella (1999) have studied in detail the Ezhava attempt at social mobility through migration and related transformation of consumption practices. Their study has highlighted how consumption was a conscious attempt because the community, especially migrants, chose consumption arenas which would ensure their mobility; at the same time, they rejected certain other arenas which might not be significant towards this attempt at change of status.

While hoping for mobility within the caste system through sanskritizing their rituals and adopting upper-caste consumption practices, they also endorse the narratives of modernity and progress of their community through receiving modern education and migrating for work (Osella and Osella 2000). This needs to be explored in some detail.

Reshaping of Religious Rituals

In the village under study, Ezhavas are the majority; Nairs, Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, Christians and Brahmins are also present in significant numbers. The majority of Ezhava informants have a family shrine as part of their ancestral homes. Their deities are usually not part of the Hindu pantheon. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement, initiated by the Ezhava social reformer Sree Narayana Guru during the 19th century, fought to end inequalities against Ezhavas in the society. Guru regarded toddy tapping and trading as degrading and considered these occupations largely responsible for the deplorable socio- economic status Ezhavas found themselves in. He also tried to transform the religious practices of Ezhavas. Due to his widespread influence, Ezhavas gave up the practices of sacrifices and offering toddy, and sanskritized the temple rituals to an extent. But it was after the Gulf migration, and specifically after the second wave of it in the 1990s, that the family shrines began to transform into temples proper and the priests began to dress up and look like Brahmin priests with Vedic rituals being conducted. Earlier it was mostly an older member of the family who did the pujas; now families insist on having a priest trained in rituals to perform temple duties. Most of the families observe stricter pollution purity, akin to Brahminical temples, with the priest not touching anyone and women only participating in worship and barred from other activities related to temples. What is even more striking is that a few of the informants insist that this has always been part of the custom and not much has changed with regard to systems of worship and rituals. But there also exists a counter explanation that this is a fairly recent phenomenon. The former group was quite vociferous in declaring that Ezhavas as a group have always adhered to rituals, which has resulted in the community's prosperity; they believe that the Brahmins and Nairs have diluted many of the practices owing to 'modern' education and employment which has led to their seemingly less prosperous condition at present. One of the female respondents was very critical of the ritual practices of some upper-caste families of the village:

We [her family] have always been very religious. We observe *shudham* [ritual purity] very strictly. We do not cook or eat non-vegetarian food during Mandhalam [41 days during winter when devotees observe fast for Sabarimala pilgrimage], Navaratri and Karkitakam [a month in the Malayalam calendar during which, Hindus believe, the Ramayana was written]. But there are many families I know who are upper castes in name but do not observe any such practices. They think that they are educated and we are ignorant for observing all this. But I can tell you, such people will not prosper in the long run. All my brothers and cousins are in the Gulf now. We may not be upper caste but we are richer than them [the upper-caste families] now. I sometimes feel a lot of education is also bad for you. If it not were for families like us, who would keep all the rituals intact?

Those informants who described adoption of caste Hindu practices as of recent origin were not critical of this phenomenon but were primarily against the practice of lavish

spending for religious customs. These narratives correspond to what Osella and Osella have described as the community's 'identity gap' whereby the community has denied the existence of their past identities (Osella and Osella 1999, 573). I would suggest that new capital and attempts at caste mobility through adoption of caste-Hindu practices have reversed the effects of reform movements which aimed at (and were successful to an extent in) getting rid of unwanted casteist rituals. Mobility came at an expense. Meanwhile, caste mobility is still elusive. Adoption of such practices as a result of acquisition of new capital and aimed at social mobility present the intertwining of modernity with tradition, in fact complicating and redefining the process of mobility itself.

The most glaring change, perhaps, in relation to religious practices is the lavish annual temple festivals usually financed by the members of the family with a shrine (locals also contribute to a much lesser extent). Migrants started this trend; now almost every family with a shrine does this, although families who are more affluent or have more migrants clearly outdo others. Older Ezhava informants react negatively to this massive display of wealth where one family tries to surpass the other in the scale of celebrations. The village had been one of the strongholds of communist party and spearheaded the unionising of toddy tappers. But that past is conveniently relegated to the background; it is, of course, part of the larger progress narrative but only invoked when needed.

On the outskirts of this village is one of the most important shrines of an Ezhava deity which is (in)famous for *mantravaadam* (black magic) and related rituals. It attracts devotees from all over the state and sometimes even from neighbouring ones. A former trade union member and retired toddy tapper described its evolution from a small shrine in the 1970s where locals came to worship to a massive temple complex flanked by the chief priest's equally massive homes on either side and a fleet of luxury cars. From following Ezhava rituals, it has now transformed to become highly Hinduised, the chief priest dressed in Brahminical fashion, only more flamboyantly. One can see huge hoardings with pictures and directions, describing it as the 'original' and 'authentic' shrine, on the way to the village from the highway. The informant is of the opinion that 'business' increased there when Gulf migrants and businessmen started pouring into the village to either do pujas to increase their wealth or perform *manthravaadam* (black magic) to ward off evil eye from all their acquired assets as well as to attain prosperity. They also perform pujas to harm one's enemies. He remarked on the irony of Ezhavas resorting to black magic when their spiritual leader has abhorred all superstition associated with religion. Younger informants, though, seemed to be happy and proud that the shrine attracts upper-caste Hindus, especially upper-caste movie stars and politicians.

Interviewer: You must so proud to belong to this village. It has such a rich history.

Respondent: Yes. But not many people know about it now. At least not people of my age.

You can't blame them, there is nothing here. Thank God for the temple. Many celebrities and politicians visit the temple. I have spotted so many movie stars myself.

Interviewer: But don't they do *manthravadam*?

Respondent: Maybe they do, but so many people have work because of the temple.

Earlier, community gatherings were related to agrarian practices or religious rituals. Such practices ceased to exist after agriculture declined as the main occupation. The entertainments related to religious rituals were discarded as primitive and uncultured as a result of socio-religious reform movements. Arts thrived inside elite spaces like temples and upper-caste homes to be savoured by 'respectable' people. These arts, now packaged and projected to tourists as 'authentic' Kerala, required specialised training to be enjoyed and are not representative of a mass Kerala culture, existing in elite pockets only. Meanwhile, dancing or any fun activity in the public sphere was and continues to be highly frowned upon in Kerala. Osella and Osella (1999) have observed how it is not possible to dance in joy in a public place in Kerala. Dancing in public places is ironically associated with drunkenness or moral weakness. Weddings or such gatherings do not feature dancing. Till recently, any woman who was considered slightly flirtatious was described as *aattakkaar*, meaning 'dancer' but not in a good way, with dancing being associated with people of loose morals. It might not then be a big leap to deduce that people thought they had to get drunk in order to have a good time in a society that will not let individuals have a good time if they are sober.

Gender Repercussions

As mentioned earlier, local temple festivals transformed into spectacles as a result of new capital. A few decades ago, it was not uncommon to see women and children walking to the local temple post dinner to watch a late-night drama or Kathakali performance. They would stay there, watch the performance, sleep in the temple grounds, and get back home next morning. Since the temple festivals changed in scale and started attracting crowds from outside of the village, this practice has gradually declined and has now almost ceased to exist. It is almost impossible to see a solitary woman unescorted by a man or at least a boy in the rural areas of Kerala post sunset. The 'modern' consumerist practices and new capital have thus, in many ways, restricted the freedoms enjoyed by women in rural areas. In urban areas, the freedom of mobility is sometimes limited to a class of women who could be potential consumers (Phadke 2007). The idea of 'desirable modernity', which was indoctrinated through western education and solidified by socio-religious movements, was further cemented by migration.

Osella and Osella (1999) have briefly touched on the increase in the use of gold among Malayalis, especially Ezhavas, during recent times, tracing the practice to their being forbidden the use of gold ornaments earlier. According to some informants, it was migrant Ezhavas who started the trend of gifting enormous amounts of gold to brides as, because of being a patrilineal community, daughters did not inherit landed property. Gold probably served two purposes. It was a safe investment with assured returns and an instant source of mobility for the wearer, announcing their affluence to the world at large. This trend was later adopted by the non-migrant elite of Ezhava community, and promptly picked up by migrant and non-migrant elites of other communities. This should be read in connection with studies which show that the shift from inheritance to dowry has implications for gender relations (Kodoth 2004). Non-migrant informants, especially women, were quick to point out the difficulties such practices have caused the labour class among Ezhavas because of the social pressure of trying to keep up with them. But the predominant sentiment is supportive of the practice. Many women pointed out that gold is the only commodity a woman can claim ownership of. Money is usually handled by the menfolk. Land is never inherited by women. Gold, especially that received as part of dowry, because it is predominantly worn by women, is something a woman can stake claim to.

With new capital seeking to achieve mobility through imitating practices of dominant communities, male migrants began to equate leisure with status and work with resource scarcity. This adoption of upper-caste gendered practices has led to educated but unemployed women because while education is a symbol of higher status, class and affluence, employed women are not. Upper-caste women are either confined to the home or sometimes engaged in jobs that do not require physical labour. Hence 'respectability' was automatically attributed to the phenomenon of having educated, unemployed women in the family. The Gulf migrants encountered a similar 'zenana' culture in their country of emigration as well. Gulf countries do not have a particularly impressive track record with regard to gender equality. This might also have led to the reinforcement and perpetuation of the trend of restricting women's mobility. Walsh (2011) also talks about migrant hybrid masculinities whereby for men who migrate to cities like Dubai where women's work at home is trivialised and a toxic breed of masculinity thrives, the patriarchal gender norms the migrant had already internalised in his home country are reinforced.

Some informants talked about how they are treated with dignity and how they receive respect as labourers back in the Gulf and gave that as the reason why they chose to remain there. According to them, in Kerala, a manual labourer has no dignity. This observation is in direct contrast to the findings by Walsh (2011) who has stated that cities like Dubai are racially and economically segregated, and that emigrants from Third World countries are subjected to discrimination at the workplace as well as exploited economically. Consequently, this exploitation might also have an indirect effect on their sense of self and masculinity, and thereby gender relations in the state.

Female employment and migration evoked mixed responses from respondents. Many of the female informants were housewives but still had a generally favourable attitude to women doing 'respectable' jobs. One or two young women from 'good' families in the village had migrated to the US for work. A general sense of pride in such achievements characterised the narratives of most informants. But anxieties and panic around women from economically deprived sections migrating for work exist. This is generally related to the 'exploitation' angle because women migrating for unskilled or domestic labour are not usually highly educated, hence more vulnerable. Safety seemed to be the major concern when women and their work lives are being discussed (Kodoth and Varghese 2012). Migrating to the Gulf after marriage and working there is assumed to be desirable because the Gulf is presumed to be 'safe' for women with husbands. Female informants were enthusiastic about their children's education and hoped to see them in salaried jobs. They also showed a favourable attitude towards Gulf migration. Some informants preferred options that are closer home for their children.

Conclusion

The impact of migration on a society occurs at many levels. Even though the most direct connection that it is drawn is to development, migration need not be a linear narrative of progress as it is sometimes made out to be. For instance, male and female migrations impact a society in very different ways, right from the percentage of salary being remitted back home to the average age at marriage to decision-making at home. Skilled and unskilled migration, country of migration and a host of other factors alter the dynamics of migration. It is thus a nuanced phenomenon which needs to be analysed for its micro as well as macro level impacts.

It is not the intention of this study to generalise and claim that migration has spelled doom for gender equality in Kerala society, but it cannot be ignored that new capital has been restrictive in terms of opportunities for the marginalised and the less upwardly mobile groups, of whom women constitute a large proportion. The case of other marginalised social groups and the ways in which the hyper mobility of some social groups, resulting from migration, has affected them, need to be analysed as well. More than the act of migration, it is the conspicuous consumption aimed at social mobility that has had a relatively major impact. While mobility has occurred for many, it has inevitably left behind, in visibility and acceptance, a large group with a rightful claim to shared fortunes: the female migrants.

Migrant masculinities play a definitive role in changing the landscape of their home spaces and in turn impact non-migrant masculinities. But the impact of geographies of space on the construction of new identities, or the reconstruction or reinforcement of existing gender identities of migrants, is an area that demands more inquiry. Moreover, migration's, or rather the migrant's, complex and uneasy relationship with modernity and tradition in terms of desirability of social actions also calls for attention

Although my attempt at understanding male migration has tended to look sceptically at the construction of nostalgia around 'home' and cultural identity, this phenomenon also needs to be examined in terms of the impact of displacement and discrimination that occurs as the migration process unfolds. This possibly forms a significant theme in the narratives of migrants who perform unskilled jobs abroad.

The gender exclusivity of drinking spaces is representative of the divergent ways in which women are restricted from public spaces, with simple pleasures of life rendered complicated by discourses on morality. The drinking spaces are more or less democratic, at least in the rural context where the ethnography for this study was conducted. But it fiercely excludes women and protects its gendered nature. These exclusionary practices have been the underlying reason behind the Kerala's disturbing record of gender justice. Loosening of spatial restrictions will go a long way in ensuring inclusion and safety for women.

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