

Do the Kerala nurses in Germany break the myth of migration as a male-space?

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Abstract

In this paper, we are interested in the curious case of the Kerala nurses in Germany in the 1960s and '70s and their location in the context of gender-migration interface. These migrants challenge the myth of migration that migration is quintessentially a male-dominated space where women are largely represented as dependents. The moot point of this paper is to explore their cases within the larger context of gender-migration nexus and break this myth. As a women-driven immigrant community, the nurses from Kerala offer a perspectival shift in terms of understanding heteronormative structures within migrant households and outside, including adjustments in gender-roles and gender-based performances. Through this paper we argue that heteronormativity is often replaced by transnational patriarchy, because diaspora formation, similar to nation-building, is a patriarchal process.

Keywords: Kerala nurses; migration; gender and migration; heteronormativity; Indian migrants in Germany

Introduction: Significance of the Kerala nurses from the 1960s today

This paper emerges from our preoccupation with the Indian immigrants communities in Germany. As a subject of migration-related research, migrants from India to Germany did not classically constitute a popular community; apart from the occasional explorations and analyses conducted by Thomas Faist, Carsten Butsch, Urmila Goel, to name a few. However, the growing popularity of the European Union Blue Card re-established the Indian immigrant communities in Germany in the map of migration studies. As migration scholars fixated on highly-skilled immigration, we came across the Kerala nurses in one such occasion and found their cases highly relevant for not just throwing light on the general status of how the Indians arrived in Germany across time, but also for a nuanced examination of the current migration trends from India to Germany, especially within the broader context of gender-migration interface. Kerala nurses represent what is popularly termed as the second phase of migration from India to Germany. They are so far the only women-led immigrant community from India to Germany and one of the very few in the history of migration, demonstrating an

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unpopular yet significant trend (Goel, 2008, 2013). They offer an interesting ground for understanding gender-migration intersection and the location of women and work in the discourse of migration studies. Consequently, in this paper we are interested in this dimension of relation between gender and migration (Palriwala and Uberoi, 2008) and its social outcome. We argue that the Kerala nurses deconstruct the myth of migration based on the assumption that it is primarily a male-dominated discourse (Walgenbach, 2007); we also argue that consequently, these women migrants shift the heteronormative structure of gender roles within and outside households, provoking us to rethink the discourse of transnational patriarchy (Jongwilaiwan, 2011).

Most of the academic papers on the Kerala nurses can be traced back to Urmila Goel's (2008, 2013) work on the Malayali community and their second generation in Germany. During the economic miracle in the 1960s, Germany was suffering from employee shortages including in the health sector. In the wake, it initiated contracts for nurses with South Korea and the Philippines. However, this was not sufficient. As most of the hospitals in the then West Germany were run by the Catholic Churches, the churches started exploring their transnational network (Goel, 2013). This brought about six thousand trained and untrained young Malayali women from Kerala to the then West German cities. Most of them were between sixteen and twenty five years of age. They migrated under temporary labour contracts. The trained nurses got immediate job opportunities after migrating to Germany while the untrained ones went through necessary trainings. However, a significant portion of them were also made to go back to India under the re-integration program in late 1970s.

Heteronormativity and Transnational Patriarchy: Women-led migration and dependent men

In a classical sense, feminization of migration offers an interesting framework for examining gender-migration interface, especially within the realm of care giving (Labadie-Jackson, 2008) and the stereotype of labour migration of women based on heteronormative performances. Coupled with this, in this paper we are also interested in how transnational patriarchy interjects with the discourse of gendered performances as a migration determinant. Heteronormativity and transnational patriarchy rest on the discourse of gendered performance of women migrants both within the domestic spaces and outside. However, women labour migrants as caregivers offer a break from that stereotype at one level, and exacerbates the conflicting engagement with gendered performances at the other. Transnational patriarchy also argues in support of how gender roles both at home and outside inform the pathways (Marmani, 2022), decisions and frameworks of migration of women labour. In that context, this paper considers both heteronormativity and transnational patriarchy useful and argues that as transnational labour migrants the Kerala nurses do not just offer a break from the stereotype, their arrival in Germany during the 1970s must also initiate new discussions around the consequences of labour migration led by women where the men follow as dependent migrants. Consequently, the significance of the Kerala nurses in Germany must be considered in the light of this dual attributes emphasizing the arrival and visibility of the male migrants as dependent on women labour migrants from India to Germany.



From that standpoint, the cases of the Kerala nurses in Germany do not just reproduce the existing gendered performance frameworks that feminization of migration points us at, it also opens the discussion on women-led migration as a field of understanding men as dependent migrants. Men as a dependent migrants, although offers significant insight into the outcomes of women-led family migration, has not found the deserved space in the literature on gender-migration debate so far. Although scholars like Gallo (2006) argued that Malayali men in Italy do not find it easy and promising for them, leading to repercussions for them and their women counterparts both at home and at work, especially within the context of migration outcomes. Not similar but in a comparable fashion, in this paper we instrumentalize heteronormativity and transnational patriarchy to examine the case of the Kerala nurses and also the husbands arriving in Germany as the dependent migrants.

Methodology

During the course of exploring the Malayali diaspora in Germany, we came to appreciate the significance of both primary and archival sources³ in understanding the peculiarity of the Kerala nurses in Germany. One of the most interesting archival sources is the representation of Kerala migrants in Germany in the world of fictions, journalistic writings, cinema and documentaries. In this regard, Jose Punnamparambil has produced monumental work, stretching from the journalistic writings e.g. the case study published in *Vinayan* in 1976 titled *Profile of an Indian Nurse in West Germany* to his continuous reporting on the uncertain future of the nurses post re-integration process initiated by the Catholic Nurses Guild of India, among others. Next, *Translated Lives*⁴, a film by Shiny Jacob Benjamin constitutes another significant archival resource. This is a short film based on the lives of the Kerala nurses in Germany, tracing their arrival in the host society in the 1960s. It is interesting to note here, especially within the context of transnational patriarchy and patriarchal positionality, that while Shanti Bihari Seth's biography (one of the prominent Indians in Germany during the initial years of Indo-German migration) was titled *Two Lives* as he lived both as an Indian and later as a German citizen, with enough consideration for double consciousness (Du-Bois, 1993), the short film on Kerala nurses is titled as *Translated Lives*, possibly emphasizing the gender-specific challenges of women migrants as breadwinners/caregivers across nation-states. Thirdly, a number of magazines have been encapsulating the lives of the Malayali community in Germany since the '60s e.g. *Wartha*, *Ente Lokam* and *Meine Welt*. These magazines also serve as crucial archival sources.

While the archival sources offers a glimpse of the past, the fieldwork in and around the NRW (North Rhine Westphalia) region in Germany has been highly enlightening in investigating their status today. We conducted field work in the NRW region in Germany for about seven

³ The authors have been engaging with Deutsche-Indische Gesellschaft in Duesseldorf, Cologne/Bonn, since most of the Kerala nurses migrated to and have been living in North-Rhine Westphalia. Secondly, Syro-Malabar Indian Community in Frankfurt has been another site for archival documentation as the migration network for the Kerala nurses were initiated through the Catholic Churches. Next, centres for intercultural exchanges like Kerala Association, Bonn, indischen Kulturvereinen Kerala Samajam Köln, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne, where the Koelner Indienwoche takes place every year, The Tagore Centre in Berlin, to name a few, were explored extensively. Along with these, Unity Archive of the Evangelical Brotherhood Heernhut, Inventory Siemens AG, Institute of Contemporary History, Munich, Historical Archive of Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt am Main, Foundation Rheinisch-Westphaelisches Wirtschaftarchivs zu Koln, Archive of the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, Archive of Social Democracy of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Staatbibliothek zu Berlin and Federal Archives, Department of Film Archive, Berlin are also part of the archival exploration.

⁴ *Translated Lives* also won Laadli National Media Award for Gender Sensitivity in 2011-12

months and had twenty-five interviews⁵ within the Malayali community at large and the Kerala nurses and their children (second generation) in specific. Consequently, this paper is informed by data gathered through field work and existing literature.

As a part of our methodological framework, here it is perhaps also significant to locate our positionality as researchers. As researchers, both Punnamparambil and Goel are cultural insiders. Consequently, their level of intimacy is both a boon and a bane – as cultural insiders while they are able to examine the lives of these immigrant women through the lens of familiarity, it is also challenging at the same time to generate data as participant observers when one is close to the subject of investigation, especially as a member of the same community. On the other hand, as authors of this paper, we could maintain a certain level of distance and anonymity. As Indian passport holders, we demonstrate a certain level of intimacy but at the same time, as non-Malayalis, we stand at a distance from the community as such. As social anthropologists, we consider this to be an effective positioning for understanding the status of the Kerala nurses in Germany beyond what is known already. We entered the field with the help of a friend of a friend, a second generation Malayali in Cologne, but our experiences as the outsiders (non-Malayalis) helped us with non-participant observation raising interesting anecdotes. We consider this insider-outsider positionality as critical to examining the overall location of the Kerala nurses in Germany today.

Location of the Kerala Nurses within the larger context of Indians in Germany

Although the nurses from Kerala came within the formal framework of temporary employment contracts, as emerges from Punnamparambil's local news reports, they often felt ill-treated and the promises claimed in their contracts were not met. Nevertheless, from a larger perspective, migration enabled these nurses to send remittances home and facilitate upward social mobility for their families back in Kerala. This mechanism worked for a decade after which it appears that the labour shortage in Germany was replenished. As a result, in the '70s, several German states intended to send the nurses back to Kerala. This initiative was supported and facilitated by the Catholic Nurses' Guild of India as a part of the re-integration process. However, as Punnamparambil (1978, 1979) maintains, the nurses were dissatisfied with this forced re-integration initiative as they felt that their opinion was never asked in this matter. They claimed that while they migrated to Germany to respond to the labour shortage in the host society and served here for a decade, they should now have a say in the transnational decision of staying back or return. Consequently, the re-integration process was not a success and majority of the nurses decided to stay back in Germany and build a home. Jesse, one of our oldest participants clarified this position; she tells us: "Most of us were happy working and earning our own money. So we were not interested in going back. We wanted to continue working, earning salary and sending some money to Kerala. We girls (sic) wanted to push for that."

Consequently, they settled in the cities and hinterlands of NRW and Hesse including Cologne, Frechen, Leverkusen, Bad Godesberg, Bonn and Dusseldorf, to name a few. Those who decided to stay in Germany brought their Indian husbands as dependent migrant spouses. Here again, Jesse adds, "We were young girls so marriage was definitely on the cards. Kerala is built on remittances so it was not a problem if we wanted to get married to Malayali men and they came with us to live and work in Germany. So this is what we did, the idea was good,

⁵ Names and personal details of all participants have been anonymized with their informed consent.



men got good jobs too. But the initial years were a bit of struggle; bureaucracy is huge in Germany so the husbands had to wait until they were allowed to work here". As Jesse and other participants confirmed, the husbands were not allowed to work in Germany for the first four years. They invested these four years in building cultural associations. Urmila Goel (2013) observes that the husbands, not being able to immediately enter the labour market, were bored at home and wanted to access the public sphere, so they created their own formalized spaces of worship, sports, celebration of festivals and cultivation of music. In this context, Philip Mathew, one of the second generation immigrants from Kerala shares, "I remember going to this church in Cologne that my father and his friends helped establish. My parents in fact still go there every Sunday. It is nostalgic for us. My father later became the treasurer and catholic priests from other parts of Germany also visited our house because my father was so involved in Church activities. It will be wrong to say that he is religious, but church meant a lot to him because he could socialize through this network, not just with other Malayalis but with other Germans who go to church regularly. I would say church was an immersive experience for him and it helped him integrate in Germany".

Churches where masses were celebrated following Syro-Malabar or Syro-Orthodox rites became additional nuclei around which Kerala associations developed (Goel, 2013). The Malayali community was one of the first communities of Indians in Germany with strong internal bonds and associations. As a matter of fact, in post-war Germany, Kerala nurses comprised the only Indian immigrants in Germany as such. Later during the 1970s, the Sikhs from Punjab arrived in Germany and other European states through both informal and formal networks. However, the Kerala nurses remained concentrated in the NRW region and integrated with the German society through religion, marriage and their second generations (Butsch, 2016).

However, bringing the husbands to Germany on spouse visa and having them find work in Germany was not a smooth experience. Arrival of the dependent husbands in Germany shifted the heteronormative structure in their households, in terms of gendered role playing. Unlike what was then commonly perceived as socially accepted norm where men earn the wage and women care for the household, in the Malayali community in West Germany, it was the women who went out and worked while the men, at least for the first few years until the arrival of work permit, had to confine to domestic chores. Traditionally, migration has been viewed as an essentially male experience (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008, Donato and Gabbacia 2015) where the women are dependent migrants. However, the case of Kerala nurses in Germany reversed this gendered role. In this regard, Philip K.C. our participant shares: "It was not easy for me, and many like me (sic). I was about 27 years old, a young man with a lot of potentials. When we got married in Kozikhode, I knew Rose, my wife, was already working in Cologne. I was a maths student, so it was likely that I too will have a good job here. I did get a good job later, but the years in between were not easy. I was not prepared to stay at home and wait for the work permit like that. I did not mind helping Rose in housework, but completely taking over the household responsibilities was not what I wanted to do....I wanted to help her, but I was not perhaps prepared for the change in the household structure. We also spent a lot of time, all men like me together, planning some cultural associations through the church network."

Due to this shift in the heteronormative structure, many couples returned to India or migrated to another country or the husband migrated to other countries for work while the wives

continued working in Germany. In other cases, the husband just stayed back in Germany but unemployed for a long time. This largely paved the way for emergence of associations and Malayali ‘societies’ in the then West Germany where the husbands would spend the ‘working hours’ by actively participating in the structural and functional processes of these associations (Goel, Punnamparambil and Punnamparambil-Wolf, 2012).

In situations where the women married local Germans, or their Indian husbands migrated to other countries for employment, the Kerala nurses remained alienated from their native language and other cultural compulsions and anecdotes practiced back in the home country. Consequently, they spoke more German than Malayali, their domestic relationship started evolving (e.g. sharing the load of housework) and they started assimilating more with the everyday practices in Germany. In this context it is relevant to mention that while the Kerala nurses constitute the first arrival of Indians as a migrant cohort in Germany, before them only male students arrived in a scattered manner, occasionally accompanied by their married partners. 73-year old Maria Gily tells us: “Now you find so many people of colour working in Germany, that time it was rare. Moreover, brown women working in full time jobs was even more scarce. Germans did not have much idea about how Indians are, at least about Indian women. When I went out wearing a saree or a bindi, people were curious. The image of Indian women in Germany that time was quite confusing and people were inquisitive” (sic).

From the perspective of imagining the migrants, the arrival of Kerala nurses in Germany brought a shift in the heteronormative structure and impacted the way Indians were perceived so far in the German society – as a male-dominated (as students and breadwinners) community with the women as dependent spouses with little agency of migration and other decision-making processes. So far in Germany, Indian women were perceived essentially as performing traditional gender roles as care-givers within the domestic spaces. Kerala nurses represented a defining break from that imagery as they were care-givers that earned them their bread too. In other words, emotional labour were now translated into instrumental labour in the public spaces. Also, their arrival initiated a reassessment of the traditional gender roles of Indian men as they were dependent on their breadwinning wives, at least temporarily. Therefore, arrival of Kerala nurses in Germany brought a certain break in the hitherto existing perception of the Indians migrants in the host society. Consequently, it makes an interesting case for studying gender-migration interface within the discourse of Indian immigration to Germany.

As briefly mentioned earlier, from 1950, students, mostly male, started migrating to the then divided Germany. Those who came in this first phase usually migrated for higher education, returning to India afterwards. However, a few stayed to pursue white collar employment and integrated with the German society through citizenship, employment and marriage (Gottschlich 2012). This phase of migration was followed by the Kerala nurses in the 1960s (while the students were still arriving but in a scattered manner). In the 1970s, Germany witnessed the arrival of Sikh migrants from India (Nijhawan 2016, Gottschlich 2012). In the 1970s and 1980s the Indian state of Punjab saw violent inner-state conflicts with the central government when the Khalistan movement strived for independent statehood. During this period, migrants, both single men and families headed by a male father figure or husband or brother, came to Germany and sought asylum. Even if asylum was granted in some cases, many male Sikh migrants found other ways of legally staying in Germany e.g. through marriage or an “exceptional leave to remain” (German: “Duldung”, Gottschlich 2012, Goel 2008). For



this group, Sikh temples or Gurdwaras emerged as the nuclei for the formation of communities headed by Sikh men with and without families brought from India. Many of these migrants came from rural backgrounds, few were academics (there is little academic data on the Sikh migrants in Germany; we gathered this information during our interviews within the Sikh community in 2017-2019). Therefore, many had to take up low-skilled occupations, working at Indian restaurants, Indian groceries and in garment industries in North-Rhine Westphalia.

Consequently, barring the Kerala nurses in the 1960s, Indian migrants in Germany till year 2000 (Gotschlich, 2012) were dominated by men migrating for education, work or due to political conflicts in India. However, with the introduction of the German Green Card Scheme in 2000 and later with the growing popularity of the EU Blue Card in Germany, Indians started arriving in large numbers – either with employment contracts or for university degrees. The interesting point here is to note, unlike the Sikh immigrants who were dominated by men, the Indians arriving as a part of what we could perhaps term as new migration (Biao, 2021), are no longer male-dominated as such. On the contrary, more women are arriving not just as spouses, but as independent migrants either with employment contracts or as university students. Although we cannot compare the increasing rate of arrival of Indian women migrants in Germany with that of the Kerala nurses in the 1960s and 1970s, it could be interesting to pay attention to this trend and investigate if a pattern emerges out of this.

Witnessing the filed: Key Observations and Analyses

Heteronormativity as the defining premise of perceiving gender role bifurcation implies that stereotypical Indian representation of gender role emphasizes women's domesticity and men's mobility. Accordingly, migration and movements initiated by women followed by dependent men or initiated by independent women brings forth a major shift. Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) discuss that women migrants often work under multiple constraints that define their overall image in the host society. Also, while performing their migration-specific roles (breadwinners) which in this case cut across their tradition gender roles (care-givers at home), Kerala nurses in Germany stand significant to the overall discourse of gender-migration interface. Classically, nation-building is a gendered process where the women constantly reproduce the nation by giving birth and raising children i.e. nation-building through nature and nurture, while men perform more instrumental roles (Ortner, 1987) of accumulating wage labour, and maintaining the border of national territories. As Menon (2008) argues, heterosexual patriarchal family is the epicentre for maintaining property relations, nation-building and community status quo. Consequently, heteronormativity does not only organize gender relations, but the whole society, the nation and relation between nation-states.

From that standpoint, we argue that construction of diaspora is a process similar to nation-building. It involves continuous assertion of identity and practices of identity-based politics both in the domestic and public spaces. Gender roles based on the heteronormative frameworks insist that male migrants have both autonomy and agency in migration-related decision-making processes (Boyd, 2006) and women are to follow their men as dependents. This has been the globally accepted norm. As a matter of fact, the Sikh migrants arriving in Germany during the 1980s makes one such typical case. On the contrary, the arrival of the nurses just a decade before the Sikhs arrived, brought a shift in the perception of traditional and stereotypical Indian migrants in Germany, a break from heteronormative image building

of migrants. This is not to argue that such a break from the stereotype brought significant and substantial changes in the way Indians started to be perceived in Germany; it is however to submit that all subsequent immigration that happened from India to Germany has referred to the gender-migration debate set forth by the arrival and experience of the women nurses from Kerala.

This is where heteronormativity as a conceptual framework for measuring how women migrants' relations evolve to accommodate multiple gender norms beyond the traditional breadwinner-caregiver binary. Some of these norms typically emerge in the immigrants' host society and continue thereafter. Here intersectionality gathers significance. Echoing Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Urmila Goel (2015) challenges the notion that women are a homogeneous category and posits them in terms of their racial and caste positions. Extending this argument forward, Walgenbach (2007) argues that class (classism), race (racism) and gender (heteronormativity) triad dominates the discourse of intersectionality especially within the contexts of migration.

Subjects of heteronormativity and intersectionality also gather traction for assessing migration experiences since migration, here of the Kerala nurses, involves body as a locational site of work space experience. In other words, nursing as a profession combines emotional and instrumental roles and apparently disengages the component of nurturing from the world of domesticity by co-locating it at the realm of profession and public spaces. All these happen with the body of the migrant as the site of a workspace. We introduce the term "co-locating" because emotional caregiving as a profession is offered at both within the premises of the home and outside. This makes it possible to consider the body of the women as a premise of both paid and unpaid work, turning it into a site of conflict and contestation. We discuss this further in the paper while contextualizing motherhood.

To do so, it is also imperative to consider that within the Malayali community, the experiences of migration and settlement in the host society for the Kerala nurses differed from one case to another. To begin with, gender role and patriarchy are likely to have implicated the ones who married Malayali men differently from those who married their German partners. Next, it is also interesting to look at how the experiences of migration shaped those nurses who stayed single in Germany and in turn how the host society perceived and categorized them within the context of transnational patriarchy. Here, taking Goel's argument further, we observe that it is not just intersectionality, but transnational patriarchy as well, along with heteronormativity, that dominate and shape the way Kerala nurses and their second generation have evolved in Germany until date.

Transnational patriarchy has been discussed extensively by Rattana Jongwilaivan (2011), while talking about the cases of Thai women marrying Singaporean men and the concomitant movements and mobility in international marriage migration. In this paper, we locate transnational patriarchy for examining the pattern of relationship among the Kerala nurses and their spouses, both Indian and German, who all were now negotiating in a space heavily impacted by the questions of nation-state, international borders, citizenship, work permits and labour migration. Also, with reference to the shifting gender roles that almost essentializes the cases of Kerala nurses in Germany, it is interesting to explore how patriarchy operates in this context, especially when men have to channelize their agency primarily through the establishment of clubs and associations while the women do the instrumental job of bread winning. Moreover, as heteronormativity as an almost universally accepted premise of gender



relations and gender roles establishes itself, the focus has to also be on patriarchal bargain (Jongwilaiwan, 2011) within the broader context of transnational patriarchy for assessing the differential level of oppression, gender relation and role reversal between the Kerala nurses and their spouses. This is particularly important because the way gender relations unfold for the migrants within the diaspora (however small), will have direct and strong bearing on the way the host society perceives the migrants and vice versa. However, Patil (2013) observes that while discussing transnational patriarchy, one must not stay away from also engaging with the differential experiences of women (here the Kerala nurses) from the context of intersectionality. Therefore, within the context of international migration and mobility, the term intersectionality, at least for this paper, may be interchanged with transnational positionality (Anthias, 2008).⁶ Consequently, what emerges is how emotional labour performed through movements and mobility of the body as the site of migrant experiences translates into professional (read instrumental) commitment that in turn define the shifting gender relations between the Kerala nurses and their spouses at in the domestic space, which also then influences their perception in the host society in Germany.

Another interesting perspective emerging from our field work is motherhood. Motherhood brought heteronormativity back for many such nurses in Germany, who, now had to bring the emotional labour back home – from and after work. As expressed by one of our participants, “I knew I will have to mentally be more present at home (sic) once my daughter is born. Before, it was my husband who took care of the house since I would work full time. However, not that I worked any less after the baby came, but I had to divide my attention – to home and work, sometimes more at home”. This arrangement seemed natural for most of the subjects we spoke with, as motherhood was considered a natural selection after migration, marriage and a stable source of income.

Other participants who chose motherhood resonate this response, although those who married local Germans had a different experience. Nancy, a second generation Malayali in Frechen confided, “Mother would usually drop me to the kita (playschool) and my papi (father) would pick me up from there and feed me when we came home. He had a business. After feeding me and getting me something to read, he would do his daily financial calculations at home until Mother came back. Then he returned to his shop and later we all would eat bread and soup for dinner. Dinner was always a family affair and we all took part in there. So it was never like Mother was solely responsible for me or my sister – no, they both took care of us and took turn to raise us.”

Again, for some others, heteronormative structures were not absent but different. Said Evelyne, “Both me and my husband always worked full time. While I found lot of my other colleagues having to juggle home and work, I had it more sorted since my husband took care of the house too and also shared the baby-load. But, it was my maternal family.....insisted that I stay more ‘homely’ and perform my maternal roles more in detail”.

While heteronormative role playing was insisted upon, in some cases, by the maternal families of the nurses from India, in some other cases, it was the traditional migrant perception of the

⁶ “The concept of translocational positionality addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions. As an intersectional frame it moves away from the idea of given “groups” or “categories” of gender, ethnicity and class, which then intersect [...], and instead pays much more attention to social locations and processes which are broader than those signalled by this.” (Anthias, 2008).

German husbands that could potentially intensify gender norms. For example, Esther - now retired and living in her own house in a small village near Duesseldorf, expressed, "I married my German boyfriend after a brief courtship of a year. Although he never expected or insisted that I leave my job or cook and clean, as most of the middle class married women in India did that time, but he kind of expressed his surprise that Indian women could be so forthright and independent. In his words, till he met me, he had met few Indians and all men, and mostly heard stories that the wives were very domesticated".

Conclusion

It is this differential level of migrant experiences coupled with gender-based performances that enables us to argue in favour of the significance of intersectionality in gender-migration debate. As witnessed among our participants in this paper, heteronormative negotiations almost always would depend on the choices the nurses made in terms of selecting their partners, and also on their class position in the host society. In other words, the way in which heteronormative structures influenced the lives of these nurses in Germany heavily depended on whom they married, if they married at all, what kind of social mobility they achieved in the German host society after marriage, what kind of jobs the Indian husbands found after migration and so on.

Consequently, the question is – how do we locate patriarchy in this shifting of gender roles and gender norms. To answer this question, we ought to look back at the Malayali associations. These associations and societies of the Malayali diaspora in Germany are dominated by Malayali men, although it is the women who spearheaded the entire migration process and brought them to the host country. From that standpoint, despite their status as dependent migrants, the immigrant men often enjoyed greater visibility due their public engagements. This facilitates their access to the host society, as pointed out by one of our participants, that often allow them quicker integration and immersion in comparison to their women partners. Consequently, transnational patriarchy could possibly manifest in a new avatar where although migration as a process is led by women, immigrant experiences vis-à-vis public visibility and assimilation were nevertheless dominated by men.

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