



Status of Women in Kerala- A macro level Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Kerala, the tiny state in the Southwest corner of the Indian peninsula, has received worldwide attention for its unique development experience which is often called as Kerala Model of Development. The uniqueness of the Kerala model lies in the high social development with a low percapita income. Kerala has made significant achievements in the field of educational and Health sectors which is almost comparable to that of developed countries. Moreover, Kerala has been quite different from the rest of the country in terms of the indicators of women development. Kerala has a favourable sex ratio of 1084 in 2011. Similarly in terms of literacy, life expectancy, and mean age at marriage, women in Kerala score higher than any other state in the country. The main objective of this paper is to examine the status of women in Kerala by analyzing the literacy rate and Female Work Participation rate on the basis of Census Data. However, in spite of the outstanding achievements in the Human Development and Gender Equality indicators, Kerala lags behind other states in terms of women empowerment especially in terms of the rate of women work participation.

KEYWORDS : Kerala, female literacy and work participation rate

Introduction

Kerala, the tiny state in the Southwest corner of the Indian peninsula, has received worldwide attention for its unique development experience which is often called as Kerala Model of Development. The crux of this model is the coexistence of high social development along with low economic development. Kerala has made significant achievements in the field of educational and Health sectors which is almost comparable to that of developed countries. Moreover, Kerala has been quite different from the rest of the country in terms of the indicators of women development. Kerala has a favourable sex ratio of 1084 in 2011. Similarly in terms of literacy, life expectancy, and mean age at marriage, women in Kerala score higher than any other state in the country. Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Equality Index (GEI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Kerala stands first. Similarly Kerala has the lowest total fertility rate and lowest percentage of women with anemia. Kerala's maternal mortality rate is also much lower than the all India average. But the economic and political participation of women, the most important dependent variable affecting gender relations at the household level and society, is very low.

It is a fact that women in Kerala have always enjoyed a better status in society than their female counterparts in the rest of India (Dreze and Sen 1996). The objective of this paper is to analyse the current status of women in terms of female literacy and work participation rate in Kerala

However, in spite of the outstanding achievements in the Human Development and Gender Equality indicators, Kerala lags behind other states in terms of women empowerment especially in terms of the rate of women work participation. The gender profile of Kerala exhibits some interesting features. Women account for 52 per cent of the total population of the state. The sex ratio of the state has been consistently favourable to women and it is the only state where women outnumber men in India. The women of Kerala are in a better position in terms of social development indicators such as education and health. The life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rate also favour women in Kerala. (Jameela)

Table1 Gender Profile of Kerala on Selected Indicators

Indicators	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Female population	10.8	12.9	14.7	51.4	52
Sex ratio (females per thousand males)	1,016	1,032	1,040	1058	1084
Literacy rate	69.75	78.85	89.81	90.92	93.91
Males	77.1	84.56	93.62	94.2	96.02
Females	62.53	73.36	86.17	87.86	91.98

Source: Various Census Reports

Women's position in Kerala is far above that of women in other states of India in terms of Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI). Kerala has the unique distinction of having a literacy rate which is comparable to the most developed countries of the world. The following table 2 provides

the literacy rates of Kerala for the period from 1951 to 2011, separately for males and females. In the case of female literacy Kottayam district occupied highest position in 2001 with 94.35%. But in 2011, that position has occupied by pathanamthitta district with 96.26%.

Kerala which ranks first among the Indian states in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) however presents a weak picture with regard to female work participation. It is a paradox that contrary to the expectation that the higher economic growth and high literacy rate of female would lead to greater participation of women in productive employment, Kerala experiences one of the lowest female work participation..

Work Participation Rates in Kerala

The Work Participation rate (WPR) is defined as the proportion of workers to the total population. It is often considered as an indicator of economic advancement of any state or country. The work participation rate (WPR) is significantly higher for males than for females in rural as well as urban areas both at national level and in Kerala. However, the gap between male -female WPR is higher in Kerala as compared to India. The female WPR in Kerala was falling continuously from 16.6 to 15.9 and 15.3 per cent for the Census years 1981, 1991 and 2001 respectively

Table 2 Work Participation Rates in Kerala - 1981-2011

Year	Total	Males	Females
1981	30.5	44.9	16.6
1991	31.4	47.6	15.9
2001	32.3	50.4	15.3
2011	39.8	53.3	25.5

Source: Various Census Reports

Table 3 Rural-Urban Work Participation Rates in Kerala - 1981-2011

Year	Rural Kerala			Urban Kerala		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
1981	31.3	45.2	17.7	27.4	43.4	11.8
1991	32.1	47.9	16.9	29.6	46.8	13.0
2001	32.6	50.2	15.9	31.6	50.8	13.5
2011	38.85	55.6	22.1	37.7	57.7	17.7

Source: Various Census Reports

In 2011 Census female WPR in Kerala has shown an increasing trend with 25.5. The rural female WPR in Kerala is higher than urban WPR. Another feature of WPR of females in Kerala is that in the urban areas, work participation rate has been rising steadily from 11.8 per cent to 13.0 per cent and then to 13.5 per cent during the Census years 1981, 1991 and 2001. It is again increased to 17.7 percent in 2011. As per Census 2011, the FWPR of the state has increased by 2.8 points in the last decade. Among the districts Idukki has the highest work participation rate in the case of both males and females. Similarly Malappu-

ram possess lowest work participation rate in both cases. The female work participation rate of Idukki has shown an increasing trend from 28.1% in 2001 to 33.2% in 2011.

Kerala's labour market is constituted by features like, high educated unemployment especially among female, manual labour shortage, lower economic participation of females and higher propensity for migration. Even though we boast of high human development, women empowerment etc, these are only myths and not a reality. Family background plays a prominent role in work participation of women especially in developing countries. This is because family background, portrayed through the educational and occupational characteristics of the parents, reflects socio economic level of the families. (Devi). Only good, quality education can equip the women with necessary skills for finding out a job. The reluctance of the parents to send their daughters to schools and colleges situated far away from their homes may be another reason for the lower enrolment of the girls in educational institutions imparting quality education/professional education. The main reason for this reluctance lies in the security concerns as Kerala is a state notorious for violence against women. Despite all their claims to literacy and empowerment, they are not safe in their home state

Lack of interest on the part of girls to secure jobs after their studies is yet another reason for the low work participation rate. They think that after their marriage, husbands will take care of them. (Jameela) In Kerala we can see that women in the higher class are not allowed to work after marriage because their families are not in need of their income. In some cases, even though girls are interested to study; they cannot continue their education because of several problems in their husband's house. Female is not considered to be a bread winner and their job search boundary is limited within their locality and is mainly

due to non-economic work and reproductive role. Marriage seems to push female to domestic work. Home and Child care responsibilities demand a substantial amount of mothers' and wives' time which otherwise could be spent on gainful activities. (Devi, 2002).

Conclusion

It has reached the conclusion that work participation of females are declining even though female education in the state is progressing. Faulty education system in the state of Kerala, predominance of arts and science colleges with conventional courses, huge fees charged in the self-financing colleges, lack of professional colleges in the government sector, preference of white collared jobs, gender discrimination, low quality jobs, less employment opportunities, lack of technical education for girls etc are some of the factors identified leading to low work participation of women. The orthodox attitudes of the people have to be changed and have to give more encouragement to women education and employment. Government has to take gender policies which are giving prior importance to the biological role of young women and should provide necessary age relaxation and considerations in the case of higher studies and job market.

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