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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS OF WOMEN IN KERALA.

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Abstract

Women constitute almost half of the total population in India but they are not enjoying their freedoms, equalities, privileges, on part with their male counterparts. Since implementation of planning in India, several policies and approaches were made to reduce inequalities between women and men. As a result a shift from 'welfare' to 'development' to 'empowerment' to 'human development' approaches has taken place to change the position and status of women. The status of women in India is a matter of serious concern. The violence and crime against women has been ever on increase, since independence. And so has been the perpetuation of structural and cultural inequality practiced in various forms despite the constitutional and legal guarantees aimed at equality and against discrimination in any form. This paper investigate - whether the Women's in Kerala are having same status and rights as we are claiming regarding Equality, Education, Health, Labour, Employment, Marriage and Family life. It gives importance on the position of women in various fields like family life, social life and work situation. It highlights on literacy level of women, Health status of women, and women's role in decision making. This paper also gives emphasis on number of women in total workforce and their wage rates. Women in Kerala are a valuable, healthy and educated resource; and can contribute effectively in all aspects of development of the state. An attitudinal change can be brought about by highlighting successful endeavours of women and by providing support systems for the multiple tasks they take up.

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Introduction:-

Even after independence and the constitutional guarantee of gender equality in 1950, the condition of women in India continued to remain marginalized in all the socio-economic, educational and political fields. This was brought out very sharply by the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in the early 70's which revealed that in some domains, for instance employment, the situation had deteriorated. Gender disparity and discrimination shown to women emerged as a major issue. While initially the approach at redressal was more 'welfare oriented', in the succeeding decades, it shifted to the development of women and in 1980's and onwards, the shift took place from development to the empowerment and autonomy of women. (Economic Review, 2011)

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Empowerment is a continuous process of realizing the goals of equality, human liberation and freedom. Women's empowerment implies equality of opportunity and equity between the genders, ethnic groups, social classes and age groups, collective participation in different spheres of life etc. The major landmark in the field of women empowerment was brought about by 73rd and 74th amendments in the first half of the 90's in which 33% reservation to the women in the Panchayats and Municipalities was made mandatory. (Economic Review, 2012)

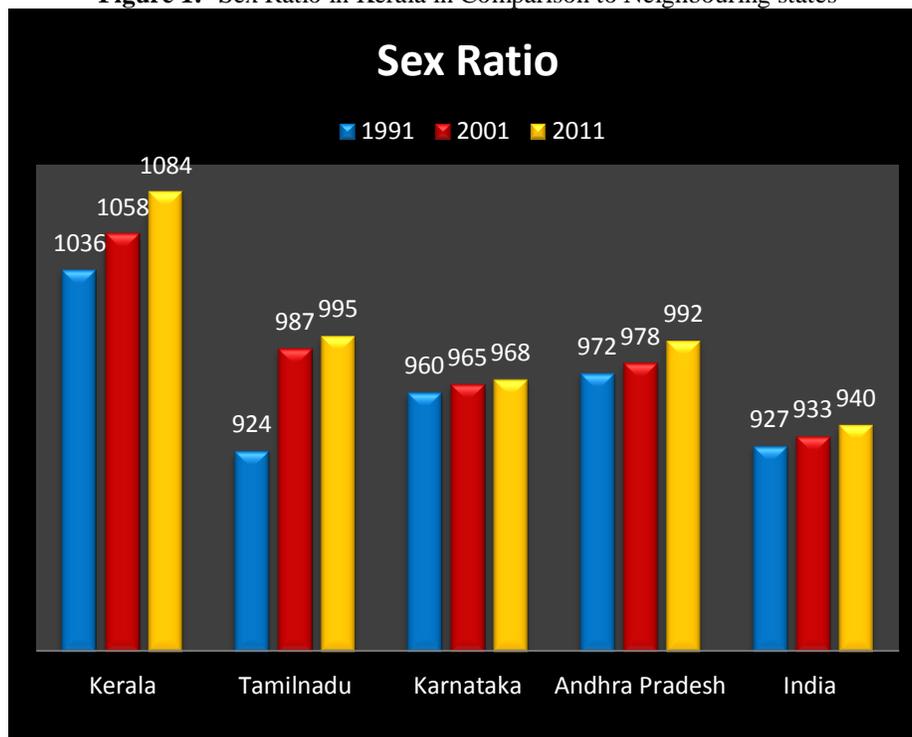
The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is the latest index for measurement of gender disparity which was introduced by UNDP in Human Development Report, 2010. Gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development are measured by this index. The three aspects are 1) reproductive health (which is measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates), 2) empowerment (measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males with secondary education) and 3) economic status expressed as labour market participation. The GII of 155 countries has been calculated and according to the value of GII, these 155 countries have been ranked. India's rank in Gender Inequality Index is 130 and the GII value of India is 0.563 while that of top ten countries is below 0.05. The indicators "highlight areas in need of critical policy intervention and it stimulates proactive thinking and public policy to overcome systematic disadvantages of women" (Human Development Report, 2015).

Among the Indian states, Kerala is known for its impressive human development achievements. With regard to the GII components, the indicators of maternal mortality rate, adolescent birth rates and proportion of adult females with secondary education are impressive in Kerala. But the indicators of labour market participation and proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females show that, Kerala's performance is poor and is below all India average. Hence, a paradoxical situation of high achievements and equality in health and education dimensions with poor performance and inequality in terms of economic and political participation exists in the State.

Sex Ratio:-

Women constitute 52% of the state's population. The overall sex ratio of Kerala is 1084 females per 1000 males. Sex ratio is one of the most important social parameter indicating the balance between males and females in the society. The overall sex ratio in Kerala continues to be favourable to women, being 1084 compared to 940 for the country as a whole. Further, the overall sex ratio is favourable to females in all the districts of Kerala. (Census, 2011)

Figure 1:- Sex Ratio in Kerala in Comparison to Neighbouring states



Source: Census of India, 2011

Literacy Rate and Education:-

Female Literacy Rate in Kerala (92%) is the highest among Indian states. However, the Male Literacy Rate in Kerala is still higher at 96%. Hence a small gender gap exists. (Census, 2011).

Table 1:- Literacy rate- Kerala 1951-2015

Year	Persons	Male	Female
1951	47.18	58.35	36.43
1981	78.85	84.56	73.36
1991	89.81	93.62	86.17
2001	90.92	94.20	87.86
2011	93.91	96.02	91.61
2012	93.95	96.21	91.99
2013	94.01	96.41	92.09
2014	94.36	96.67	92.65

Source: Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority, 2014

Table 2:- Girls' in Enrolment- at Different levels-2015-16

	Boys	Girls	Total	% of Girls
School Education	1907811	1864910	3772721	49.43
Higher Secondary	168191	187606	355797	52.73
Graduation	226500	155520	70980	68.66
Post Graduation	14029	22883	30294	75.54
B Tech	4022	2348	6370	36.86
M Tech	607	768	1375	55.85
Total Engineering	4629	3116	7745	40.23
Polytechnic	10518	21587	32105	32.76

Source: DPI, DCE and DTE, 2015

In the case of education, enrolment is universal at the primary level and gender parity has been achieved. Girl students constitute 49.4 % of total student enrolment in schools, showing more or less uniformity. Girls outnumbered boys in terms of enrolment in higher secondary education at 52.73%. Dropout rates are low for both boys and girls. At the tertiary level also, the enrolment of girls is higher than boys. For example, girls constitute 68.66 percent of total enrolment for degree courses in various Arts & Science colleges under the four general universities in Kerala during 2014-15. When Post Graduation is considered, the girls' position is highest with 75.54%. Hence, girls are well off in terms of education in Kerala. But when the intake of girls in engineering colleges and polytechnics is considered, the situation is different. Out of the total enrolled students, girls constitute only 40.23% in engineering colleges and 32.76% in polytechnics.

Health Status of Women in Kerala:-

Most of the health indicators in Kerala are highly favourable to women. Life Expectancy at birth of women in Kerala at 76.9 years is the best in India. It is much higher than the national average at 67.7 years. As per the figures released by Registrar General of India in Dec 2013, the Maternal Mortality Rate for India in the period 2010-12 was 178 per 1,00,000 live births. Corresponding figure for Kerala is much lower at 66 per 1, 00,000 live births.

Table 3:- Health Status of Women.

Sl. No	Indicator		Kerala	India
1	Death Rate		6.9	7
		Male	7.9	7.5
		Female	6	6.4
2	Infant Mortality Rate		12	40
		Male	10	39
		Female	13	42
3	Female age at effective marriage			
		(a) Below 18	16.7	16.3
		(b) 18-20	19.2	19

	(c) Above 21		24.4	23.9
	(d) All age		24.4	20.7
4	Maternal Mortality Ratio	66	178	
5	Expectancy of Life at Birth	Male	71.4	62.6
		Female	76.9	67.7

Source: Directorate of Health Services, 2013

Women's Participation in Employment:-

Women of Kerala outperform their counterparts in many developmental indicators. But in the case of economically active persons, the indicator is not favourable to women. In countries with high human development, the share of economically active women seems to be high. Labour Participation Rate (LPR) of women in 10 countries having highest Human Development Index is around 60 and that of men is around 70 (Human Development Report, 2015). But as per the 68th Round of NSSO, a wide gap between male and female LPRs. is seen in the State. The female LPR in Kerala is 35.4 and that of male is 82.4. Consequently the difference between Male and Female LPR in Kerala is very high.

As per Census 2011, the FWPR of the state has increased by 2.8 points in the last decade. Four districts of the State namely: Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Pathanamthitta have FWPR which is lower than that of the State as a whole. Moreover, the performance of Kozhikode and Malappuram is too poor. Two districts, namely Wayanad and Idukki have FWPR which is higher than the all-India rate. Idukki has the highest FWPR in the State as the women in the rural sector of the agrarian district are more economically active.

It is surprising to note that Female LPR is much higher in some of our neighbouring countries, whose HDI rank is lower than that of India. For example Female LPR in Bhutan is 66.4, in Cambodia is 78.9, in Bangladesh is 57.3, in Nepal is 54.3, and in Myanmar is 85.7(Human Development Report 2014). It is often argued that, it may not be possible to increase the LPR of a country beyond a particular level due to various educational and family commitments of persons. So a very high FLPR of this kind may not be feasible. However, it cannot be ignored that less women in labour force means under-utilization of human resources that holds back productivity and economic growth.

Likewise, when we consider the Work Participation Rate (WPR) of women in Kerala, it is lower than that of many states in India as well as all India average. According to Census 2011, the average WPR is 25.21 in India and that of Kerala is only 18.23. A comparison of FWPR in Kerala and India as well as WPR of males and females in Kerala is shown in Figure 2. The FWPR of Kerala is one of the lowest in the country, and far below the national level.

Female Work Participation Rates in India and Kerala:-

Moreover, WPR of females in Kerala is much lower than that of males. FWPR has been increasing in India and Kerala, but the growth of FWPR in Kerala is very slow. Kerala stands first in human development among the Indian states. But the wide gender gap in the WPR pulls down our gender equality in human development.

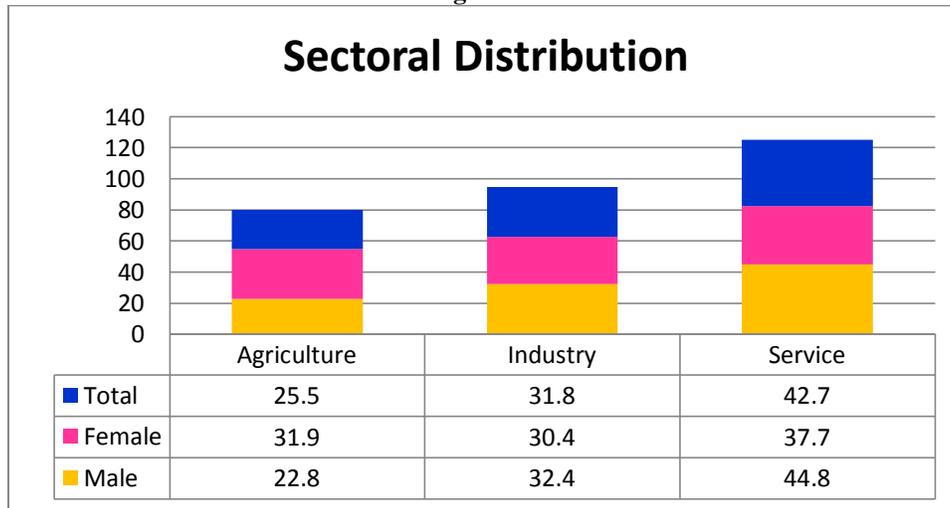
Work Participation Rates of Males and Females in Kerala:-

Himachal Pradesh with a female workforce participation rate of 44.82 is the best performer. It is surprising that the North-eastern states like Nagaland, Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have higher FWPR than Kerala (NSSO Report, 68th Round). Hence it is high time to have a relook at our strategies in this direction and perhaps learn from experiences elsewhere.

Role of self employment in enhancing the share of economically active women is very important in a state like Kerala where the educational level of women is very high. Surprisingly, even with a large number of opportunities for self employment, the share of female self employed workers seems to be significantly lower in Kerala than many other states in India. The percentage of female self employed workers (FSEW) in Kerala is 36.4 in rural area and that in urban area is 36.3. But in rural areas, percentage of FSEW is 89.5 in Arunachal Pradesh, 87.9 in Himachal Pradesh, 94.9 in Nagaland and 90.2 in Sikkim. In all these North Eastern states, FWPR is above 35% (NSSO Report, 68th Round).

Gender disaggregated data on employment can capture a clearer picture of women’s economic empowerment. The sectoral distribution of employment of women in Kerala presents in figure 2 shows that women are more engaged in agriculture but more males are engaged in service and industry.

Figure 2:-



Source: NSSO Report, 68th Round

It is clear that women’s participation in traditional industries is very high in which wage/ remuneration is comparatively low. For eg., among cashew workers and beedi workers, women constitute 95% and 99% respectively.

Inequality in Wage Rates:-

Women are engaged in agricultural work as well as in traditional industries (which are mainly coming under informal and unorganized sector) in India as well as in the State (Census, 2011). But in terms of wages and remuneration, significant gender inequality exists in the unorganized sector. Table 4 shows average daily wage rates in agricultural occupations in the State in comparison to all India.

Table 4:- Average Daily Wage Rates in Agricultural Occupations in Rural India during March, 2015

State	Sowing (including Planting/ Transplanting/ weeding workers)		Gender Attainment* Index	Harvesting/Winnowing/ Threshing workers		Gender Attainment Index
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
AP	233.87	163.46	0.70	235.32	192.42	81.77
Kerala	638.29	446.88	0.70	582.14	439.1	75.43
Bihar	225.5	185.51	0.82	218.13	196.3	89.99
Tamilnadu	317.72	233.51	0.73	393.55	201.72	51.26
All India	238.67	194.32	0.81	238.43	203.16	85.21

Source: Ministry of Labour & Employment, Govt of India

Though, the wage rates of women in Kerala are higher than that in other states and all India average, it is much lower than that of males. For Gender Development to be effective, the women of Kerala should be empowered economically and socially. Economic empowerment and social empowerment are complementary to each other. The economic empowerment of the women is attained only when they become an integral part of labour force and ultimately be gainfully employed.

Women in Political Leadership:-

Political representation is taken as an important dimension to measure Gender position in many of the Indices currently being used. For example, Gender Inequality Index developed by UNDP measures empowerment, by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females. The Global Gender Gap Report brought out by World Economic Forum measures political empowerment in terms of percent of women in parliament, percent of women holding ministerial positions, and years of women in executive office.

Achievements in health and education have empowered the women of Kerala and enabled them to take part in the practices of democracy. It is an essential condition for Equal Democratic Citizenship but not a sufficient one. Equal Democratic Citizenship will be complete only when the women get equal participation in direct decision making too. It is in this regard that the representation of women in legislative bodies becomes important. Political participation must not be restricted to casting votes during elections to decision making bodies. Rather women must occupy leadership positions in decision making bodies. Women of the state can be empowered through their direct participation in policy making. A fitting example is the local governments in Kerala, where 50% of the seats are reserved for women.

Gender empowerment is meaningful only if women have decision making powers in high bodies like Parliaments. The developed nations with high HDI levels have a much higher representation of women in their legislative bodies. When the top 8 countries of Norway (39.6%), Sweden (44.7%), Iceland (39.1%), Denmark (39.1%), Belgium (38.9%), Finland (42.5%), Netherlands (37.8%) and Cuba (48.9%) are considered, it can be seen that the percentage of women in legislative bodies is above 37% (The figure in parenthesis is the percentage of women in national parliament in the respective country).

However the accomplishment of the State with respect to women's representation in the Central and State Legislative bodies is poor. The same is the case when we take women in India as a whole. It is quite surprising that the women's status in the State in this regard is lower than that of many states in India and all India average. (Economic Review, 2013)

Table 5:- Elected Women in Lok Sabha- India and Kerala

.Year	All India			Kerala			
	Total	No. of Seats	Women	%. of Women	Total No.of Seats	Women	%.of Women
2009		543	58	10.7	20	0	0
2014		543	62	11.5	20	1	5

Table 6:- Female Representation in Legislature – Kerala

Sl No.	Name of Legislature	Number of Women	Total no of seats	%
Kerala Legislative Assembly				
1	2006	7	140	5
2	2011	7	140	5

Source: Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha & Chief Electoral Office, Kerala

Crimes against Women:-

As per the figures brought out by the State Crime Records Bureau, the total reported cases of crime against women for the year 2015 (upto September) is 9344 which registers a decline from 10690 in 2014. It is surprising that 'cruelty by husband/relatives' still constitutes a major component in crime against women. As per data from National Crime Records Bureau, Kerala is a state where 'Rate of total cognizable Crimes' (incidence of crime per one lakh female population) is much higher than the national level. Even when we want women to come out of their homes and take up employment, the insecurities within the family remains. Greater efforts are required in this direction, to enable women to take up meaningful economic activities outside the purview of their families. (State Crime Records Bureau, 2015.)

Schemes:-

Sharanya:-

Self Employment Scheme for the Registered Unemployed Widows, Deserted/Divorced/Unmarried Woman and Unwedded Mother.

The scheme is to support the unemployed widows, deserted/legally divorced/unmarried women and unwed mothers by providing financial assistance for self employment. 50% of the project cost is subsidized and remaining 50% is disbursed by way of interest free loan. The application for this purpose is collected by the District Employment Officer.

Seethalayam:- Women Health Care Centre

The Scheme provides Homeopathic aid for suffering women. It provides Out Patient services, IEC activities etc. to the needy. It is a comprehensive approach for women development. Besides treatment it combines the activities of other supporting departments for women development like Social Welfare Department, State Women Commission, Home Department etc. It provides infertility clinic services and de- addiction treatment facilities.

Medical Care for Victims of Violence/Social Abuse:-

The scheme provides counselling support to the victims besides medical treatment for physical injury, if any. This scheme functions at General Hospitals and in almost all district hospitals. (Economic Review,2012)

Conclusion:-

Women in Kerala are a valuable, healthy and educated resource; and can contribute effectively in all aspects of development of the state. An attitudinal change can be brought about by highlighting successful endeavours of women and by providing support systems for the multiple tasks they take up. Through this paper it concluded that as the women have equal participation in human development. She is half of the human race. But she lack in society. Women are not treated with respect as in the ancient Indian society. Lot of crime against women is seen in modern society. Constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get the respectable position in society. Many new tribunals and public institutions are to be establishing to guarantee women effective protection against discrimination. Kerala women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of men.

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