CHAPTER - X

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters the researcher has made a modest attempt to analyse empowerment of women in Kerala by disaggregating the concept into awareness, attitude, skills attainment, control over resources, autonomy and participation. The inspiration to pursue the present research could be traced to the researcher’s exposure to the works of eminent scholars on social development of Kerala and role and position of women in it. From the vast literature, one could glean the following about Kerala women’s social, political and legal status. Firstly, higher level of education does not help women in Kerala to attain equal status with men. Secondly, women are not placed in positions that suit to their education. Thirdly, Kerala women are inclined to overemphasise their duties as wife and mother. Fourthly, in the process of transformation of matriliny women lost both freedom and autonomy. Fifthly, the girls who are found brilliant up to secondary school education are not seen in the public domain of Kerala as professionals and politicians. Sixthly, several studies have reported that work participation rates of Kerala women are the lowest in the country. Seventhly, crimes against women are on the increase in the state. Eighthly, men fix the social orbits of Kerala women. Ninthly, the disparity between men and women on land holding has been increasing at an alarming rate. Finally, many writers have noted the decline in inheritance.
rights of women and steep rise in dowry demands. At the same time, one could observe total unanimity among scholars, that women’s contributions in the making of Kerala model of development are substantial. For instance, Jeffrey has succinctly put it as “Politics+women=Well-being” while discussing how Kerala became a development model. Further, in all India comparative studies on women’s well being, Kerala women’s position is on the top. But those high social indicators did not help women in Kerala to attain gender equity. Erwer has called this contradiction as “gender paradox”.

Precisely, the present study is an exploration to throw light on the factors that must have contributed to the making of the gender paradox.

The academic detour undertaken by the researcher through the shades and strands of feminist discourses helped her immensely in formulating her ideas on subordinate status of women.

The discussion on gender versus sex has helped to gain new insights into women’s subordination. It was found to be socially constructed and not natural. These social constructions could be eliminated through appropriate strategies like managing power relations. In fact academic debates on the strategies to manage power relations resulted into the emergence of the concept ‘women empowerment’.
Depending upon the insights thrown open by scholars like Keller (1991), G Sen (1993), Karl (1995), Rowlands (1995), Sahay (1999) and Malhotra (2002) the present researcher defined the concept as a process of awareness creation, which helps women to change their attitude and attain skills. Women empowerment enables them to assert their rights to gain autonomy and control over their lives, which leads to participation and collective actions promoting overall uplift of women.

Works of Sahay (1999), Malhora (2002), Hashemi et al. (1996) and the literature produced by agencies like CIDA immensely helped the researcher to operationalise the concept.

10.1 Summary of the findings

The study was conducted among 750 married women whom were identified through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The respondents belonged to the age group 18-60. The majority was in the age group 26-40 (50.9 percent). The mean age of the respondents was 38.5 years. 50. percent of the respondents were Hindus, 29.5 percent were Muslims and Christian respondents were 19.5 percent.

63.9 percent belonged to other backward classes and 26 percent belonged to the forward castes. 10.1 percent were scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. 63.3 percent of women stayed in nuclear families and 36.7 percent stayed in joint families. Employed participants were 31.6 percent. The percentage of the respondents with education level
graduation and above was 22. Seventy percent of the respondents were from the rural localities.

Education is found to be the most significant socio-economic variable in shaping awareness. As education increases awareness also increases. Education is significant in attitude formation also, income and locality are other two variables influencing attitude formation. Urban women showed more positive attitude than rural women. Education is the significant variable in skills attainment. Other important variables are family type and locality. Rural women have better scores in skills attainment than urban women. Income and education are positively correlated with control over resources. Autonomy is also positively correlated with education. Locality is another significant factor in determining autonomy. Rural women are more autonomous than urban women. Caste is another important variable in this regard. Forward caste women are more autonomous than backward and scheduled caste women.

The study also reveals that the only socio economic variables significant in determining participation are employment and family type.

From the analysis education has emerged as the unambiguous single variable, which has had positive correlation with all components of empowerment except participation. Influence of caste and religion is also highlighted in the present study.
10.2 The gender paradox

Kerala women are well aware of their SegaL and political rights as also their subordinate status in the society. They enjoy substantial amount of autonomy in the family and the society at large. They do have impressive control over resources. However, awareness, autonomy and control over resources do not get translated into attitudinal change, skills attainment and greater participation in the public sphere.

Empowerment: Average score on each component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>maximum Score</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Skills attainment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Control over resources</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27.31</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25.21</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems that women in Kerala are very happy and comfortable with their status as model wife and good mother. They consider home management as their ultimate life goal. Is this their willful choice? The higher scores on awareness, autonomy and control over resources *prima facie* vouchsafe an impression of willful choice.
However, it could be safely stated that the ‘will’ in the ‘willful choice’ is implanted in the psyche of the female in Kerala through the familial socialisation process and the values she inculcates through the formal education system of Kerala. The educational system and other social institutions in Kerala are oriented towards moulding a girl child into an educated, informed health conscious homemaker to earn the name as a model wife and good mother. Kerala society encourages female work participation outside the family, though it is not easily available. In the present study, those who are employed has expressed it in unequivocal terms that they are working to earn to increase the family income, to meet the family’s economic needs in a better way. They are not Inclined to think of any kind of freedom and autonomy beyond the welfare of their husbands and children.

It seems that women in Kerala agree to a kind of gender division of labour in which they think that the public sphere in Kerala, particularly the political domain belongs to the men folk. This is evident from the average scores in attitude, skills attainment and participation components. The vast differences in the average scores of awareness and attitude suggest that greater awareness did not contribute towards a positive attitude towards empowerment. Here lies the crux of the gender paradox. The attitude of Kerala women is shaped in the milieu of male domination. Therefore a strong conviction about the submissive role of women in the family and society is very much evident. They willingly accept male
dominance in the family. This “willful choice” of submissiveness is documented by the affirmation of the statement by the majority of the respondents that “a good wife should be submissive to her husband”. The majority further reinforces the acceptance of the gender roles when they agree to the statement “the primary roles of women should be that of a wife and mother”. It is also very significant to note that mothers are ready to provide higher education to daughters on par with sons to get a gainful employment.

Girls’ education and gainful employment are a kind of “value addition” to get better marriage alliances. Mothers believe that marriage is the big event in a girl’s life. This attitude is the stumbling bloc in the way of attaining skills that would enable them to take active participation in the public sphere. In short, both formal and informal agents of socialisation process and education foster female domesticity in Kerala.

Conclusions

The above discussion leads to certain obvious conclusions. The joint decision making process in the family, equity in marital life and greater amount of mobility display that women in Kerala enjoy considerable quantum of freedom and autonomy in her family life.

But Kerala women are not enabled enough to enhance the freedom and autonomy available within the family to the public domain by taking up decision-making responsibilities. They are not ready to give up their home
centered lives. When majority expressed the view that they would not contest election even if their family extended support, they meant it. This attitude of women in Kerala suggests that they have well internalised the values of patriarchal control.

It is now very clear that ‘gender paradox’ is a product of patriarchy that started spreading its tentacles ever since the days of transformation of matriliny, The invisibility of women in the public domain is due to overarching dominance of patriarchy, which does not want equal presence of women in decision-making responsibilities.

Historically, the position of women in Kerala was relatively favourable. This is due to the matrilineal system prevalent in the state that allowed some degree of freedom, autonomy and inheritance rights for women. In fact it provided considerable natal family support for girls before and after marriage.

However, along with the transmutation of the matrilineal system, patriarchal values have percolated into all facets of social life in Kerala. At the same time the forces of modernisation that worked for eliminating matrilineal system in its entirety could not scrape out all the values of matriliny. The remnants of matrilineal values are instrumental in the making of high female literacy, favourable sex ratio and such other women friendly indices. In other words these indices are definitely a contribution of the “transformed matriliney” (Saradamoni 1999).
The continued presence of certain matrilineal values within the well-entrenched structure of patriarchy opens up avenues for women’s education and employment. But their freedom, choice, autonomy, control over body and resources are determined by patriarchy. Therefore, conventional indices are inadequate to measure the status of Kerala women because these indices fail to capture the interplay of matrilineal values within the complexity of overarching dominance of patriarchal value system in the society, polity and economy of Kerala.

10.3 Policy Recommendations

1. Education is found to have significant positive correlation to all components of empowerment except participation. This fact requires a rethinking from the side of policy makers. Participation requires attitudinal change within women. Education can play a key role in this aspect. The textbooks should contain articles, which promote gender equity. There are lessons in the primary classes, which glorify the gender roles of a woman. They motivate girls to get satisfied with the roles of a mother and a wife. Such lessons should be removed from the syllabus.

2. Removing sexist bias from textbooks is not enough. Education institutions may become role models in ensuring equal participation for boys and girls in curricular and extracurricular activities.
3. More opportunities should be given in curriculum for skills attainment for girls.

4. Gender sensitization programmes for women may be conducted through local self Government Institutions.

5. Recent studies on the impact of people’s planning programme highlighted the effectiveness of training programmes conducted for the capacity building of women in enhancing their participation in village assemblies. Similar programmes on a large scale would be helpful for women in attaining skills.

6. Women resource centers may be established with the financial support from Government with the main objective of gender sensitization.

7. Women studies centers may be started in the Universities as well as affiliated colleges.

8. Women organizations may take a more proactive role in solving women’s issues.

9. Political parties should take initiatives to ensure adequate representation for women. A thorough campaign may be conducted for the enrollment of women members. Adequate representation to women should be ensured in decision-making committees of political parties.