CHAPTER – III

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA AND KERALA –

AN OVERVIEW

This chapter makes an overview of the status of women in India and in Kerala.

The status of women in Modern India possesses a paradoxical picture. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they still have to travel a long way. Earlier the status of women in India as a whole was very low when compared to their male counterparts due to several socio-economic and cultural factors like dominance of male chauvinism in the society, non-existence of employment opportunities, lack of education, absence of absolute property rights, social prejudices, social evils like sati, Jauhar, pardha, child marriage, denial of remarriage to widows and restriction on girl education, etc. During the Vedic Age, women were accorded an honoured place in the society. Lopamudra, Apala and Viswambara were the most enlightened women of that age who have surpassed their male counterparts. The status of women in the Vedic Age was high. They were instrumental in all the decision making process in their provinces. They were respected and placed in the highest esteem. Women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later (approximately 500 B.C.), the status of women began to decline with the Smrithis (especially Manusmriti) and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity curtailing women’s freedom and rights. With the rise of Brahimanism and due to conflicting religious and social thoughts, the place of women remained subordinate and unsatisfactory.
Buddhism and Jainism, however, continued to give a place of honour to women and were eligible for admission to the religious order in both these religions as is evident from the fact that Bhikshuni Sanghamitra was one of the main proponents of Buddhism of her time.³

During the Post-Vedic period women lost their independence and became a subject of protection. The assumption of superiority of males has built up the ideas of male dominance and female dependence. In the later Vedic period, women lost their political rights of attending assemblies. Women were denied the right to study the Vedas, to utter Vedic mantras and to perform Vedic rites. Marriage or domestic life became compulsory for women and unquestioning devotion to husband became their only duty.

The Medieval period witnessed a further degradation in women’s position in society and their subjugation in the religious and legal spheres. During this period the important scriptures propagated the idea that women were unfit for freedom and deserved no independence and they should be kept under the authority of men in all spheres of life. The purdah system became prevalent due to uncertain socio-political reasons. The growing incidence of child marriage, polygamy, female infanticide, devadasi system, ban on widow remarriage, seclusion, etc. were quite common in the Indian society during that period.

Various reforms and enactments were initiated during British rule in India with a view to elevate the status of women. During the period there were two major movements which affected the position of women. These were the ‘Social Reform Movement of the 19th century lead by Raja Ram Mohun Roy and the Nationalist Movement of the 20th century lead by Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Ram Mohun Roy put an end to the evil Sati. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a pillar
of social reform movement of Bengal and strongly supported women education and went door to door to persuade people to send their girl child to school. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the one to open first girl school in India and credited with opening first home for widows of the upper caste and a home for newborn girl children so that they can be saved from female infanticide. Swami Dayanada Saraswati emphasized for the equal rights for women in every field and tried to change the mindset of people with his Vedic teachings which gave utmost importance to women.

Mahatma Gandhi induced women to participate in the Freedom Movement. According to him women should be liberated from the slavery of kitchen to realize their true potential. He said that responsibility of household is important for women but it should not be the only one. In fact she should come forward to share the responsibilities of the nation. The khadi movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi offered to the masses of women an immediate open channel for their participation in the national struggle for independence. The direct participation of women in the freedom struggle had a strong impact on their attitudes also. They came out of their homes and fought shoulder to shoulder with men as their comrades and companions. The leaders and the social reformers of India were in the forefront of the struggle of women emancipation. Many women like Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur came forward. Freedom struggle led women in India as creative thinkers. The close contact with western culture, tradition, literature and education influenced the Indians. Meanwhile, there were debates on elimination of Sati, female education, widow remarriage, the age and consent for marriage, and more generally on the status of women
among Indians. The industrial revolution, American independence and World Wars made drastic changes in development of women in western countries. Changes happened in western countries have also influenced the movement of upliftment of women in India.

British rule led to realization of the need of education equally for men and women. More and more girls are given the facility to have higher education. Gender based Education and vocational training are offering stereotyped ‘feminine’ jobs for girls such as nursing, cutting, tailoring, etc. As a result woman workers are mainly concentrated in the informal sector which does not require much training or education, in traditional activities such as domestic work, laundry, child minding, farming etc. Women predominate in this sector because the only work that they can find is informal in nature and their incomes are at the poverty level. A major part of the work they do within the family does not get counted. The term ‘unorganised’ refers to the vast numbers of women and men engaged in different forms of employment. These forms include home-based work, self-employment, employment in household enterprises, small units, on land as agricultural workers, labour on construction sites, domestic work, and a myriad other forms of casual or temporary employment. The term 'unorganised' is often used interchangeably with the term 'informal', or employment in the informal sector. Strictly speaking, ‘informal’ is used to denote those forms of enterprise that are not governed by any legal framework. Although it is quite logical that an 'informal' enterprise will employ 'informal'/'unorganised' labour, it must be remembered that ‘formal’ enterprises also have 'unorganised' employees, and, in fact, there is an increasing tendency to have an informal style of employment relationships in the formal sector.
According to Indian constitution women have equal rights with men. The post-independent women movement aims at restructuring the society to remove the subordination of women to men. Women in India now participate in all activities. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years is the world’s longest serving woman Prime Minister. Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru Pandit, Sucheta Kriplani, Kiran Bedi, Bachendri Pal, Justice M. Fathima Beevi, Prathibha Devisingh Patil, Meira kumar, Kum.Mayawati, Jayalalitha Jayaram are the powerful women of independent India. Women in India have made a considerable progress in the last fifty years. But they have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male dominated society. Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society.

During the earlier days of pre-twentieth century, the women in Kerala played a decisive role in preserving the morale of the fighting forces in times of war by encouraging the males who were fighting against the enemies. Death on the battlefield was considered a great honour for a soldier. Another striking feature of social life in the early period was the high status accorded to women and they enjoyed complete freedom of movement as well as the right to education. Widow marriages were allowed and “Gandharva Marriage” was very popular. During this period, women were employed as domestic servants, agricultural laborers and gardeners. Wearing of ‘leaf skirt’ is prevalent in those days and even now among some of the hill tribes of Kerala like the ‘Koragas’ of North Malabar.

Monarchy was the most important political institution in the land; the successions to the throne were regulated by the matrilineal (makkathayam)
system of inheritance, which was another specialty of this period. The Nairs had the matriarchal system of family called Tarawad or Marumakkathayam family. In its simplest form a small family consists of a mother and her children living together with their maternal uncle, that is the mother's brother as the Karanavan, senior male, of the family. In a big family, it consists of a mother and all her children, both male and female, all her grandchildren by her daughters, all her brothers and sisters and the descendants on the sisters' side. In short, all the relatives of the woman on the female side living together in the same block of buildings, dining together in the same hall, and enjoying the property in common. There were instances of families containing a hundred or more members living in different buildings in a large compound. All the members, however, for many their generations, should be able to trace their common descent from one ancestress. Nair women during this period were able to get high respect in the family due to their right on family properties.

This situation had changed later making the senior woman no longer the head of the family, and she had to yield her authority to the oldest male member called Karanavan. Thus patriarchy has superseded matriarchy in extended Nair families. In the joint family, family property is the joint property and no member can claim or appropriate or expropriate any portion of it; the property is held in trust for the support of the females and their descendants in the female line. The property can be disposed of only with the consent of all the members. Sometimes when the Tarawad or family grows extremely large, the descendants of the family are divided according to various female lines [Tavazhi: ta = mother; vazhi = line]; they would live in separate buildings and own that portion of the
joint property which is theirs in partition and which is managed by the woman's brother as *Karanavan*.

The caste system, called ‘Chaturvarnya’ introduced during Aryan period, from 500B.C. to 1000B.C. declined in the level of general literacy of women. Sudras, the members of the socially relegated caste were denied the right to education was also restrained from enjoying other social privileges. The social status of a person came to be determined on the basis of the occupation in which he/she was involved. Those who were engaged in occupations involving physical exertion were relegated to the lowest strata of society and came to be looked up on as low castes. Side by side with the social degradation of the Panas, the Parayas and other classes of earlier days, the status of women, especially of these classes also declined to a worsened stage. Female education was neglected, even though the education of the Devadasis received special attention. Child marriages took the place and women were compelled to take to family life and they had been denied of intellectual and artistic pursuits at a very early age. Women no longer enjoyed the social freedom and equality of earlier days. The lives of widows were quite deplorable due to their alienation in the society.

During 1000 – 1500 AD, the caste system became more crucial. The period saw the origin of, *Marumakkathayam* system, Joint family system and the institution of Polyandry. This period witnessed the evolution of the feudal polity in Kerala. Devadasi system had its worst features during this period.

During 1500 to 1900, women enjoyed adequate freedom in the society. Rani Gangadhara Lakshmi, Manorama Thampuratty, Kuttykunju Thankachi and K.M.Kunjulakshmy Kettalamma were the notable personalities in that period.
Modern industry was started in Kerala in the middle of 19th century by the German missionaries and British planters were providing ample scope for the deployment of women labourers. The first cotton mill was started in 1881 in Kollam, which induced the women to enter into the industrial sector in this area.

In twentieth century women involved in public affairs and acted efficiently in areas like education, medicine and literature. In 1919, women in Travancore obtained partial voting rights. In 1922 – 23, they were allowed to enter into ‘Sreemoolam Prajasabha’ and ‘Legislative Council’. Even though, there were no voting rights in Cochin, there were demand, for considering them by giving peculiar or special participation and were published in leading newspaper. In 1924, Dr. Mary Punnan Lukose was appointed as Superior Officer in Medical Department and she occupied the position of council. In 1930, women in Kerala occupied the position in legislatures. The famous women of Kerala who acted as members of Legislative Assembly and participated in the debate for women’s rights and management include. T.Narayini Amma, Thottakkattu Madhavi Amma, Annachandi, Smt. K.K. Kuruvila, Gouri Pavithran, etc.

Women of Kerala who obtained higher position in law, medicine journalism and education during this period include Annachandi, Dr. Mary Punnan Lukose, Dr. Mettilda John, B. Bhagheerathi Amma, Gouri Sankunni, etc. Anna Chandi was the first women who obtained degree in law and many newspapers gave blessings to her for obtaining such a degree. Suriyani Christian community gave ‘Suvarna Mudra’ to Mary Punnan, who obtained degree in Medicine. During this period, each community used to give blessings and encouragement to the women who got higher education. Many communities during this period were also pressuring on the Government for giving
preferences to women in Government employment. There were women owned and administered schools such as Agasta Blan Ford in Trivandrum and Mrs. Baker School in Kottayam and these schools provide better education to womenfolk.

The new ideas about employment reservation and financial assistance to women, especially for technical education were very much discussed during this period in Legislative Assembly, Medias, public speeches, etc. There was large number of eminent women with regard to social reformation and compassion activities and Mudukulam Parvathy Amma, Arya Pallam, Parvathy Nenmini Mangalam, Devaki Narikkattiri were some of them. K.Chinnamma, the founder of ‘Hindu Mahila Mandiram’, located even now in Thiruvananthapuram, was the leading example for women engaged in compassion activities.

In the early period of this century, women were providing services in the fields of supervision, education, teaching, etc. Women had very active participation even in productive sector. In the beginning of 20th century out of 81,000 coir making laborers, 61,000 were women. Ambalapuzha coir making labourers union was the first women labour union whose secretary was Smt. K.Devayany. The first agitation by women agricultural labourers near Ambalapuzha was organised in 1930s.

Women were in the forefront in political agitations during 1930, which include Smt. Makkapuzha Karthianamma, Smt. T.C. Kochukuttiyamma, Smt. A.V. Kuttimalu Amma, Smt. K.E. Sarada, Smt. C.R. Devaki Amma, Smt. Akkamma Cheriyan, Smt. Ratnamayee Devi, etc. In the Marxist Communist party, there were so many women leaders during that periods, which include
Smt. Suseela Gopalan, Smt. K.R. Gouri Amma, etc., who had assumed leading roles in the party.

During the post-independent period women in Kerala generally obtained educational gain, safety and better status in society. But the attitude and outlook of society towards the problem of women lacks something in all fields. The constitution provides equal rights to women and men, but religious superstition and caste wise groupings have destructed the rights of women today. The educational standards of women in generally high in the State, but with regard to economic, social and cultural field they are in a relatively backward position. The women infliction and other discrimination are increasing along with this. The State of Kerala is bestowed with leading women consultants, eminent scientists, mathematicians, doctors, artists, educationalists, managers, administrators, politicians, poetesses and business entrepreneurs, during this period.

Women writers like Madhavikkutty, Sugathakumari, Sara Joseph and women liberation activist, Ajitha and Mayilamma from lower strata etc., are some glaring examples of leaders in their respective fields in Kerala. Sakhi, a women’s resource centre holds training programmes for women and Cochin Backwater Ladies circle, an organisation which is involved in arranging small events and programmes like immunisation, literary workshops for women in Kochi, Kerala. Anweshi, women’s counselling centre, in Kozhikkodu, run a counselling, meditation and resource centre for women facing any kind of abusive situation.

From 1970 onwards, development of social movements highlighting the problems of the rural and urban poor, threw up a new kind of women decision makers who had strength of street fighting, formal education and strategic thinking. The National Commission for women has generated a lot of debate
among the women’s groups. The committee for the Status of Women (1974) had recommended the formation of such a commission to take up women’s problems. The report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women (Shramshakti) gave a comprehensive picture of women’s status and recommended many concrete steps for women in the informal sector.

As a result of the economic crises of the 1980s and the commercialisation and modernisation of the economy, women lost employment in agriculture and industries. This pushed women in urban areas to find out a suitable solution for generating income, which resulted in the emergence of self-employment, largely in micro-businesses in the informal sector. Now women entrepreneurs in Kerala State are entering in the field of producing sophisticated electronic items like inverters, televisions, stabilisers, computers, etc. Technical and managerial personnel are hired by women entrepreneurs as most of them do not have the requisite industrial know how, though they highly educated. Women in Kerala are skilled in traditional and self acquired crafts like embroidery, lace, toys and doll making, weaving and so on. The dominant crops of Kerala are coconut, rice, tapioca, pepper, tea, rubber, betel nuts, cashew nuts, etc. Most of the industrial units set up by women utilises the raw materials that are locally available.

Workers engaged in the unorganised sector do not have the benefit of several laws such as the Minimum Wages Act or the Factories Act. They are also not covered by statutory welfare measures such as maternity benefits, provident fund, gratuity, etc, all of which were put in place after intense struggles by the Indian working class in the pre- as well as post-Independence period. The use of contract workers to run canteens or do housekeeping and gardening, employing teachers on a clock-hour basis, and 'outsourcing' jobs such as data
entry are some examples that may unravel the complex nature of employment in the unorganised/informal sector in the country. The workers in this unorganised/informal sector are the most disadvantaged section of workers in India. A vast majority of India’s working population is in the unorganised sector and is consequently unprotected.

According to National Sample Survey Organisation (1994), of the total number of women workers in India, around 92 percent work force are in the unorganised or informal sector, whereas only 8 percent are in the organised sector. The National Commission on Self-Employed Women, 1988, points out that the vast majority of rural women in the unorganised sectors work in farms, look after the animals, engaged in food production, food processing, forestry, rural industry, factories and construction work. In unorganised sector most of the women laborers are either illiterate or having lower education. Therefore they have to work in low paid and low skills labour work. In unorganised sector all age level women and even all caste and religious women labourers are involved. The plight of women workers in this sector is miserable as they work extremely low wages, long working hours, unsatisfactory working conditions with a total lack of job security and social security benefit. Therefore there is an urgent need to bring in legislation on regulating their conditions of work and social security. The central government is in the process of drafting a comprehensive bill providing social security and welfare of the unorganised sector workers.

Two National Labour Commissions, along with several other international and national commissions, committees and conferences in the last 50 years have documented the socio-economic conditions of workers in the unorganised sector in India. The latest is the National Commission for Enterprises in the
Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), also known as the Arjun Sengupta Committee, which submitted its report to the Government of India in 2006. The report estimated that there are over 340 million (approximately 34 to 37 crore) workers in the unorganised sector in India, and that they contribute around 60 percent to the national economic output of the country. Around 28 crore work in the rural sector, of which an estimated 22 crore are in the agricultural sector. Around 6 crore are in urban areas. Women make up 11-12 crore, of which around 8 crore are engaged in agriculture. In terms of overall employment, the report estimates that over 92 percent of the country's working population is engaged in the unorganised sector, and that the majority of women workers also work in this sector. They are amongst the poorest sections of our population. It is therefore imperative that urgent steps are taken to improve their condition, which is the Constitutional obligation of those who govern the country.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the constitution in 1990 had opened avenues for women’s empowerment. Attempt is made at International and National level to remove problems of women. UNO has conducted 4 International conferences and has drawn the attention of the member countries to cater to the needs of women and has directed to look to the world through the eyes of the women for rapid development. The year 1985 was observed as International year of the women. SAARC countries had declared 1990 as the year of the girl child to highlight their problems.

For the empowerment of women so many schemes were introduced by the Government during the post independence period. The schemes include IRDP, TRYSEM, DWCRA, etc. Of this DWCRA, a sub scheme of IRDP is exclusively for women, which is introduced in all the districts in Kerala.
well being depends on their empowerment in Social, cultural, political and economical aspects. Self Help Groups are in an important initiative for achieving this. Kudumbashree, the major Self Help Group initiative in Kerala, is aiming at women empowerment, in rural as well as urban areas. Kudumbashree units are facilitated and supported by local self governments. But the members themselves initiate and enact their own development agenda and priorities. This also leads to increased confidence in these women. This project helps to raise incomes and encouraging poor households to enter the market economy. Kudumbashree assumes great importance in terms of their high employment potentials especially among the BPL women families.

The constitution of India gives women equal rights with men from the beginning. Unfortunately, women in India are unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and lack of interest in politics. Women are striving to achieve equality - socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally. However, they continue to face discrimination and marginalisation both subtle and blatant, and do not share the fruits of development equally.\textsuperscript{8} Even though, women have participation in fields such as legislative assembly, political agitation, productive sectors, literature, etc., there were so many unfavourable factors, which constrained them to enter into social activities.

While the gender sensitisation of policies, programmes and schemes go a long way in empowering women, it is human development indicators, which reflect the ultimate and true empowerment of women in a country. The basic parameters of health, nutrition, education, employment and training reflect the continuing dismal status of women in various parts of the country.\textsuperscript{9}
Subject to law and public morality, changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women. Efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of women in India.

The world is moving fast to the participation age, which approves equal participation for all human beings irrespective of their sex. It is identified that women force is the catalysts of development. India is also moving in the same track recognising the need of the hour and taking fast steps in eradicating gender discrimination. Unfortunately all these movements are stirring the upper strata of the society and not touching the villagers and low income group. Social gatherings like Kudumbashree and Self Help Groups are trying to fill the lacuna to a certain extent. The self learning process they undergo through practical experience enables them to excel in their life and it is an educational experience that no formal schools can offer. The wide spread coverage of community based organisations of Kudumbashree has reached every nook and corner of the state.

The ratio of males and females in India and Kerala, which is an indicator of the physical role of women in the Indian and Kerala society, is depicted in Table 3.1.
Table No.3.1

SEX RATIO OF INDIA AND KERALA

(Per thousand males)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>1016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>1032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>1036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>1058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>1084</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The sex ratio measured as the number of females per thousand males is considered to be a fairly good indicator of women’s status. The sex composition of India’s population shows a shortage of females per 1000 males. Although, the country as a whole is marked by adverse sex ratio, males outnumbering females, the regional variations are quite significant. Sex ratio in a population not only denotes the quality of life but also the value placed by the society on the sexes, which in turn affects their participation. This implies that in states where women are accorded a low status as depicted by low sex ratio, the participation of women in the labour force is low. Kerala is the only state which outnumbers males with 1058 females per 1000 males as against 933 females per 1000 males at the All India level during 2001. In 2011 also Kerala is the only state which women outnumbers males with 1084 females per 1000 males in Kerala as against 940 females per 1000 males at the All India Level. There is a need to strengthen and streamline the role of women in the development of various
sectors. Utilizing their power is very important for nation building and to attain accelerated economic growth. There is an urgent need for more empowerment programmes to be implemented for women.

The education of women in India plays a significant role in improving living standards in the country. A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside of home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and in reducing the infant mortality rate.\textsuperscript{10} Literacy rate of women in a country or a State also portrays the extent of educational empowerment attained by women in that region. The State of Kerala ranks first in terms of literacy among other states in India points to the fact that educational empowerment among women in the State is very high when compared to their counterparts in other states as is evident from Table 3.2. Details regarding the literacy rates in India vis-a-vis Kerala represented in Table 3.2.

Table No.3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male (Kerala)</th>
<th>Female (Kerala)</th>
<th>Total (Kerala)</th>
<th>Male (India)</th>
<th>Female (India)</th>
<th>Total (India)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>77.13</td>
<td>62.53</td>
<td>69.75</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>34.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>84.56</td>
<td>73.36</td>
<td>78.85</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
<td>43.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>93.62</td>
<td>86.17</td>
<td>89.81</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>52.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>94.02</td>
<td>87.86</td>
<td>90.92</td>
<td>75.96</td>
<td>54.28</td>
<td>65.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>96.02</td>
<td>91.98</td>
<td>93.91</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
<td>74.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literacy rate for the country as a whole increased from 34.45 percentage in 1921 to 65.38 percentage in 2001. The female literacy rate in India was 54.16 percentage and that for male are 75.85 percentages. The gap between male-female literacy rates has decreased from 24.84 percentage points in 1991 to 21.70 percentage in 2001. In 2011 also the position of literacy shows an increase of 74.04 in general, but the male-female representation shows 82.14 and 65.46 respectively. Again female literacy rates has decreased.

Kerala which has the highest literacy rate of 90.92 percentages occupies the top spot in both male and female literacy, at 94.20 percentages and 87.86 percentages respectively. Here also female representation is less than male representation. In 2011, the position of literacy rate among male and female increased to 96.02 and 91.98 respectively, but female representation is still less than male representation. So there is an urgent need of empowerment of women for their overall progress and achievement at different levels such as economic, social and political.

There is a high correlation between female literacy and life expectancy at birth. Higher female literacy brings down the rate of infant mortality and the average number of children born per women. Educated mothers, even while belonging to lower socio-economic strata, provide better health and nutrition care to their children as well as to themselves. They also have better access to health facilities outside the home.

Details regarding the Infant Mortality rates of India vis-a-vis Kerala is presented in Table 3.3.
Table No.3.3

INFANT MORTALITY RATE OF INDIA AND KERALA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A scrutiny of the year wise data on mortality among male and female children shows that female has lowest mortality rate in 1961 and 2007 in India as well as Kerala. But the difference between female- male mortality changed in the year 2008 both in all India level and State level. These indicate that female children deserve more attention during the coming years. It is well–known and medically proven fact that a female foetus is hardier than a male foetus. Women also live longer than men if other influencing factors are similar. But the Table clearly shows that our society having an attitude to give preference for male children, are using drastic methods for elimination of females. Female infanticide is being practiced even now in some parts of the country. Methods for killing female babies can also be found out in various parts of our country. Therefore special Act should be passed for eliminating these practices and empowerment of women is must against these unfair practices existing in India as well as Kerala.

Health status of women in our country and in the State of Kerala also shows an alarming trend, which implies the dire need for empowerment of womenfolk in terms of health related activities. A scrutiny of causes of death reveals that for youngest age group, i.e.: 0-5 years, the most frequent direct or
underlying cause is malnutrition. Anemia is also a major cause of maternal deaths. The gravity of anemia prevalent among females in India and in Kerala is evident from Table No.3.4.

Table No.3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Anemic (10.0-11.9 g/dl)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (7.0-9.9 g/dl)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Anemic (greater than 7.0 g/dl)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other type of Anemia (greater than 12.0 g/dl)</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: g/dl – gram/decilitre


Anemia is a major health problem in Kerala, especially among women and children. Anemia can result in maternal mortality, weakness, diminished physical and mental capacity, increased morbidity, premature delivery, low birth weight, etc. Many of the Indian states like Kerala, Manipur, Goa, Punjab etc nearly 1/3 of the females are anemic. Even in Kerala 32.8 percentage of females are anemic in one way or the other when as against the males which represent only 8 percentage of the total. This also indicates that the dire need for various programme for their physical empowerment. The females in the household generally have low intake of calories and exhibit higher rate of morbidity. The male-female differential in nutrition status was especially large among the lower
socio-economic groups. These differences were further aggravated the increasing poverty.

In a large-scale study conducted in India by researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) covering 69,072 women (aged 15-49) and 14,552 children (12-35 months) from India found the link between domestic violence and chronic malnutrition. This is supported by strong empirical evidences that domestic violence is intertwined with malnutrition among mothers and children. The study also states that there are ample evidences of withholding of food by the in-laws including spouse as a form of abuse which is like a sort of physical torture. Physical and psychological empowerment becomes quite inevitable to make them bold enough to face such challenges. There also exists a disparity in the availability and intake of food by males and females due to several reasons, which is presented in Table Nos. 3.5 and 3.6 respectively.

Table No. 3.5

AVERAGE IN TAKE OF FOOD STUFFS (g/per day) BY INDIAN ADULT MALES AND FEMALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Stuffs</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals and millets</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (NNMB) National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau
Second Repeat Survey- Rural 1996-1998. (www.mospi.nic.in/)
Table No.3.6

AVERAGE AVAILABILITY OF FOOD STUFFS (g/per day) BY INDIAN ADULT MALES AND FEMALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Stuffs</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals and millets</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (NNMB) National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau

The average availability of Cereals and millets in India for males and females were 520 grams and 440 grams respectively. Similarly the average availability of Pulses in India for males and females were 50 grams and 29 grams respectively. However, people far above the poverty line are getting less than the recommended diets. The gap between the recommended and available quantity of food is much wider in the case of women, especially in the rural areas. Inspite of low nutrient intake, Kerala, has lowest prevalence of under nutrition and nutritional deficiency signs. This can be attributed to a relatively more egalitarian society with equitable distribution of food based on needs and ready access to health services; high literacy rate and consequent awareness about importance of health, hygiene and sanitation and ability to access services may also have played an important role. Orissa has the highest dietary intakes of nutrients but this high intake does not lead to a better nutritional status perhaps due to inequitable distribution of food within the state, districts, different income
groups and within the family. Poor access to health care might be another factor that aggravates under-nutrition.

The malnutrition results in poor health of women. The women of India are prejudiced from their birth itself. They are not breastfed for long. In the quest of getting a son the women wants to get pregnant as soon as possible, which decreases the caring period to the girl child, while the male members get adequate care and nutrition. Women are also not given the right to free movement. That is, they cannot go anywhere on their own. If they want to go outside the house, they have to take the permission of male member of the family or have to take them along. This often results in decrease in women’s visit to doctor and she also could not pay attention to her health.

National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau of National Institute of Nutrition, India conducted a National Family Health Survey [National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS-2, IIPS, 1998-99)] in which data on frequency of intake of various types of foods (other than cereals which are consumed everyday by everyone) from women (daily, weekly or occasionally) to assess dietary diversity among 90,000 ever-married women in the age group 15–49 living in 26 states were collected. As per this survey, all adult women in India consume cereals every day; their diets tend to be monotonous and there is very little dietary diversity. Fruits are eaten daily by only 8 per cent of women and only one-third of women eat fruits at least once a week. Almost one-third of women in India never eat chicken, meat, or fish and very few women (only 6 per cent) eat chicken, meat, or fish every day. Eggs are consumed less often than chicken, meat, or fish.

There were substantial differentials in food intake patterns by selected background characteristics. Poverty has a strong negative effect on dietary
diversity. Women in households belonging to low socio-economic group are less likely than other women to eat items from each type of food group listed, and their diet is particularly deficient in fruits and milk or curd. Age does not play an important role in women’s intake patterns. Women in urban areas are more likely than women in rural areas to include every type of food in their diet, particularly fruits and milk or curd. Illiterate women have less varied diets than literate women, and seldom eat fruits. There are substantial inter-state differences in intake of different types of food. This also points to the inevitability of physical empowerment of women in the country as a whole.

The mortality rate in India is among highest in the world. As females are not given proper attention, it results in the malnutrition. Moreover; they are married at an early age which leads to pregnancies at younger age when the body is not ready to bear the burden of a child. All these results in complications, which may lead to gynecological problems, which become serious with time and often lead to death. Low wages for women also perpetuate poor nutrition and ill health. Continued poor nutrition and repeated pregnancies deplete a woman physically, cause birth of premature babies and higher child mortality.

Though there are problems in the lives of Indian women but they are always ready to fight all the odds and enjoy their life to the full they have their own talent, hobbies, and they socialize according to Indian custom. In India, the withholding of food as a type of abuse could be a factor in the link between physical domestic violence and nutrient deficiencies that cause anaemia and underweight. Additionally, domestic violence has been strongly associated with a woman’s inability to make decisions for herself and her family, including the choice of types and quantities of food she prepares.
Women in Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation, inspite of legislative measures, spread of education and economic independence, women still continue to be victims of violence. They are beaten, knapped, raped, burnt and murdered. The victims of violence are those who are helpless, depressed and who live in stressful family situations. They fail to rebel for the fear that their husbands, in-laws and parents might sever ties with them. The incidents of domestic violence are in an increasing trend. Nearly 95 percent women continue to stay in a violent marriage, because they do not have the social and economic empowerment needed for individual existence.\textsuperscript{14} Women are made to believe that man is superior to woman and woman has no right to protest. Through the socialisation and events in women’s lives, they acquire feelings of depression, helpless and poor self image. The woman’s exploitation is the result of the interaction between a woman’s personality and her environment. Women are not weak but oppressed and powerless. They are not incapable but unrecognised. They are helpless due to denial of opportunity. Women are to be recognised and empowered to overcome these constraints.

The society can attain development only when it accepts women participation, grants responsibility, utilizes her ability and employability. The employment status of women in India highlights the deployment of women in the low skilled, low wage unorganised sectors like agricultural and allied sectors as is evident from Table No.3.7.
Table No.3.7.

CLASSIFICATION OF MARGINAL WORKERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of work</th>
<th>Male (percentage)</th>
<th>Female (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>18.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>18.17</td>
<td>30.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live stock, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Quarrying</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing: Household Industry</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Non-Household Industry</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade and commerce</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, storage and communication</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data compiled from Census of India, 2001

The data available for the distribution of main workers show that female representation among agricultural labourers has a glaring increase of 30.33 per cent than 18.17 per cent male labourers. 18.52 per cent female workers engaged in cultivation. But the representation of male workers in this area was only 8.02 per cent. However, women workers show hesitation to engage in mining and quarrying. Table shows only 0.10 per cent of women participation in this field. Same is the position of women workers in the field of transport, storage and
communication. Females outnumber males in the fields of cultivation, agriculture labour, live stock, forestry and fishing, and household manufacturing industry. Attitudinal change is needed in society and women themselves to engage in the areas where they are less engaged. Empowerment of women towards the concentration and development of women in these areas is needed.

Woman is the back bone of agricultural workforce but her hard work has mostly been unpaid. Agricultural technological change has displaced a large number of women in harvesting and post harvesting activities. Many women were forced into less skilled, low waged, manual jobs, etc.

In rural areas, nearly 63 percent of male workers are engaged in the agricultural sector while secondary and tertiary sectors nearly 19 percent and 18 percent of the male workers were engaged. There was a higher dependence of female workers on agricultural sector nearly 79 percent of them were engaged in agricultural sector while secondary and tertiary sectors share 13 percent and 8 percent of female workers respectively. In urban areas, nearly 59 percent of the male workers and 53 percent of female workers.\(^ {15} \)

The sheer members of proportion of india’s workforce dependent on agriculture labour and /or small scale agriculture demamnds attention. Female headed agricultural labourers have to face more challenges than others. Decreasing demand for labour and changes in cropping pattern also creates severe problem to them. There exists wage disparity between male and female labourers in agricultural sector in India, Table No. 3.8 clearly shows the picture.
Table No.3.8

Table 3.8 shows that the average daily wage rate of female among unskilled agricultural workers has continued as very low than male workers.
during the last 8 years. There is no considerable variation in the percentage change of females over males. Females are getting a wage rate of 30 per cent less than the wage rates of males. In 2005-06 females got only 65 percentage of the wages of males. After completing 5 years in 2009-2010, there is only 71.28 percentage change of wages of females over males. From Table No.3.8, it is clear that there is no equality in the wage rates between males and females in our country. This is considered as severe discrimination existing in the wages provided to females. Awareness about existing Labour Act in India is urgently needed and empowering them through education is inevitable.

The plight of women who are working in the field of construction is also quite deplorable and needs attention of the authorities concerned to make them more empowered to cope up with adverse environments in which they are forced to work. In recent years, the construction sector has witnessed a boom. In the case of concreting works undertaken as part of construction works, it was found that in 15 minutes, about 55 bundles, each weighing 7-8 kg pass through the hands of women. In an 8 hour shift therefore, an incredible 14080 kg would have passed through women workers hands. Women workers in the construction industry are also largely victims of desertion by their spouses. This often lead to a high incidence of women headed households in this sector which are more poverty prone and vulnerable.\textsuperscript{16}

Though Kerala ranks top in women’s literacy rate and education, the work participation sex-ratio shows a deviation. The higher rate of literacy / education among women is not a sufficient condition for gender equality in work. Along with low work participation, rates of unemployment and gender differentials in the labour market persist across the society. This also indicates the relevance of
women empowerment in all spheres. Work participation rates among male and female workers are shown in Table No.3.9

Table No.3.9

MALE AND FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATES IN KERALA AND INDIA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males - Rural areas</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female - Rural areas</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male - Urban areas</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female - Urban areas</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While the female work participation rate (in rural areas) has decreased from 32.8 percentage in 1993-94 to 32.7 percentage in 2004-05, in Kerala, the ratio continues to increase from 25.6 percentage during the same period. But in the case of female work participation rates (in urban areas) has increased from 15.5 percentage in 1993-94 to 16.6 percentage in 2004-05. As far as the rate is concerned it has stagnated during 1999-2000 at 20.3 percentage and has decreased slightly to 20 percentage during 2004-05. Considering the All India Work Participation Rate of Females from urban areas, the involvement of
females from urban areas in various works is fairly high when compared to the All India level.

The statistics pertaining to the work seekers in Kerala also depicts the position of women work seekers in the State as is evident from Table No.3.10

Table No. 3.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>16.45</td>
<td>1718632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>22.60</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>2472255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>39.00</td>
<td>39.53</td>
<td>4190887</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Economic Review (various issues), State Planning Board, Trivandrum.

Table 3.10 indicates that the number of female work seekers is has been showing an increasing trend from 2006 to 2010. It is also seen that the number of female work seekers are higher than that of males. It indicates that females are more affected by unemployment than men. So the unemployment situation of women in the State needs special attention.

The economic status of women in Kerala is revealed by the employment position. The employment status of the women of Kerala is depicted through their involvement in both the public and private sector undertakings in the State. Details regarding employment of men and women in the public and private sectors in Kerala is shown in Table No.3.11
### Table No. 3.11.

#### EMPLOYMENT IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN KERALA. (In lakhs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Public sector</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Grand total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>6.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>6.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>6.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Directorate of Employment and Training, 2009, 2010*

From table 3.11 it is evident that the participation of women in both the public and private sectors in the State are low when compared to the male participation in these sectors.

The government of India believes in gender equity and has initiated several women oriented programmes in the field of education, training, employment, health and welfare and has introduced several laws to eliminate
crimes against women. The parents of today are sensible enough to understand that education is the best gift they can give to their daughters. The men’s mindset also is slowly changing. In such a favorable environment, if women choose to be ignorant about all the efforts taken by the government and the women activists, even in the 25th century, they will remain backward and will be paying a heavy price for their dependency. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment.17

The representation of female workers in the areas of Information Technology is high because of lack of their hesitation to engage in I.T field. But while working in the I.T field, they have to work overtime in the evening shift without sufficient leave facility. This will adversely effect their family life also. Same is the position of women workers in the field of Nursing. Nurses are working overtime without adequate remuneration. Today educated women are reluctant to work in these areas. Attitudinal change is needed in society and women themselves to engage in the areas where they are less engaged with the sincere support of family members especially her husband. Empowerment of women is needed to make them more confident in involving in these areas.

Superstitious beliefs and taboos in a well educated society is yet another paradoxical situation which needs some positive societal intervention strategies through empowerment. In any household women have decisive roles especially when it happens to be the welfare of the family. In situations where the decisions pertains to the construction of ones own home, marriage of offspring’s, rituals pertaining to birth, death, family deluges, etc., women households assume dominant and persuasive roles, making their counterparts to follow the customs and traditions whether they are based on superstitious beliefs or taboos.
Irrespective of various castes and creed, a major chunk of Keralites are becoming ardent believers of certain superstitions without considering its scientific base. Many social evils engulfing the society and prevalent even among the literates could be uprooted only through various women empowerment programmes like ‘Kudumbashree’ which has been attaining wide popularity among various strata of the society.

Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/ and kind by the bride’s family to the bridegroom’s family along with the giving away of the bride in Indian marriage. Dowry originated in upper caste families as the wedding gift to the bride from her family. The dowry was later given to meet with marriage expenses and became a form of insurance in the caste that her in-laws mistreated her. Although the dowry was legally prohibited in 1961, it continues to be highly institutionalized. Now a days the bridegroom often demands a dowry in the form of land, vehicles, flats, furniture and electronic goods, animals, etc. Cultural practices such as the payment of dowry tend to subordinate women in Indian society.\(^{18}\) The practice of dowry abuse is rising in India. In India, violence against women is a common evil. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. The woman is not safe anywhere, neither at home nor at work place. The most severe in ‘bride burning’, the burning of women whose dowries were not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. It is evident that there exist deep-rooted prejudices against women in India. Every hour a woman is raped in India and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death due to dowry problem.

Official statistics show a steady rise in dowry crimes. More than 95,000 women are killed every year in India over dowry. Bihar and U.P still record the maximum number of dowry crimes, but Bangalore, India’s fastest growing city
also shows an alarming rise. On an average of 4 women are reportedly die everyday because of dowry harassment and domestic violence. The cases of dowry torture are the highest accounting for 32.4 per cent of crimes against women in the country.\textsuperscript{19} It is clear that Dowry was also the root cause of many other malpractices in the society including female foeticide which is still rampant in North India. Dowry giving is growing in Kerala also.\textsuperscript{20} Women and women oriented programmes like Kudumbashree must strive to end dowry system.

Literacy coupled with profligacy is yet another paradoxical situation pervading in the Kerala economy with its deleterious effects on the saving habits of Malayalee, Women households are more responsible in one way or other for the increased spending habits of Keralites. Unlike in olden days women of Kerala due to high literacy rate are more exposed to technologies substituting various tedious household activities, avenues of entertainment, food and health related expenditure in respect of an array of items etc. This ever growing profligacy without adequate purchasing power and economic resources especially among the women folk of the state, often lead the family members to financial stringencies followed by greater mental stress. Kudumbashree projects making women to inculcate habits of thrift in a collective and sustainable way becomes quite imperative in this context.

False ego regarding one’s own status in society is another paradoxical situation. Many of the women households in Kerala are found to be retaining false ego with respect to their status in the society. In the pretext of such false prestige in society many of the lower and middle class families of Kerala are involved in spendspre activities, especially making the women households to ooze. Consequently these households become an easy prey to money lenders,
pawn agents, and to the New Generation Banks which are levying exorbitantly high rates of interests and hidden charges. In a micro family system there is no source of solace from such a family environment to take wise decisions to tide over the crisis. The frequent gathering of Neighbourhood groups makes an environment more or less similar to that of a joint family system whereby the female households who are in financial crisis and mental stress get alternative ways of livelihood in a collective way. At present, through the involvement of various programmes and projects, women of Kerala having get more empowered to take up various challenging tasks in an easier way.

Consumerism among Kerala women is also a paradoxical situation. The State of Kerala has been regarded as a potential market for many consumer items, health care products, cosmetic items, ornaments and apparels, foot wears, mobile phones, electronic gadgets, motor vehicles, flats, villas, items of interior decoration, etc. Women play decisive roles in the purchase or acquisition of these items. These items which devour a substantial chunk of an average malayalee’s family expenditure, making a positive or a negative influence in the family life, also need a serious attention through the empowerment and awareness of the womenfolk of the State.

Changing Life styles of men and women in Kerala is the result of a consumerist culture. In Kerala people’s lifestyle have also changed in the sense they are more lavish, full of material comforts rather than focussing on simplicity. Personal relationships also get affected as people are busy trying to earn more to maintain their standard of living. Carving for goods is high. The wants and desires of the people increase. The better their income, the better would be their purchasing power. But in case they are not able to do so, then they feel
dissatisfied. Mental health also gets affected if one’s desires are not met timely leading to mental stress, depression, jealousy and envy which in turn can lead to crime.

Life has become more hectic, tough, tense and devoid of personal relationships. As a result psychological and other health problems have increased among the Malayalees. Changing food habits, sedentary lifestyle, mental depression, loneliness, etc., are the causes behind this phenomenon. Studies reveal that many suicides and homicides carried out by women in Kerala are linked with consumerism. Women are the worst victims of consumerism. People who have lost their jobs are finding it difficult to meet both their ends. It is estimated with regard to consumerism, Kerala is at the top among the Indian states. It is unambiguous to be stated that the society is the prey of consumerist culture. Here, one is valued for what one ‘has’ and not for what one ‘is’ and moreover what is enjoyable and useful is considered good and worthwhile in this society. The aftermath has got reflected in the families too. Relationships within the families are easily prone to be frail and hypocritical. The outcome is alarming rate of divorce, single parenthood, extra-marital affairs, violence etc are moving on a fast track leading to severe conflicts with the existing deep rooted cultural value system. Migration of younger generation from rural to urban areas has resulted in the empty nest syndrome of elderly and they indeed are considered to be obstacles and burden to the enjoyment of life and hence many families try to get rid of them.

The so called globalization and the blossoming of the consumerist culture had absolute reflection in the life style, perception and attitude towards women in Kerala. Society has commoditized women, converting her into objects of lust,
using her to promote commodities as well as using her as a commodity for sexual gratification. She is cocooned in the male dominated society and a prey of consumerism. In Kerala, marriage is the ultimate goal of women so no woman who is unmarried has social status. In the present scenario, this auspicious function too has undergone drastic transformations. Marriages have become occasions of vulgar public performances of a family’s filthy wealth, status and style. The distinct feature of modern dowries is the inclusion of large amounts of gold, cash, and consumer goods. Furthermore, the importance of life cycle rituals, performed on these occasions are reported to have become highly commercialized and demanded much like dowries.\textsuperscript{21}

The suicide rates among young men and women in southern India are the highest in the world. The reasons for the dismal state of mental health among people in the South are family conflicts, domestic violence, academic failures, unfulfilled romantic ideals, voracious appetite for high-end consumer goods spurred by moneylenders and hire-purchase schemes, the wide gap between people’s aspirations and actual capabilities, the disintegration of traditional social support mechanisms as was prevalent in joint families, emergence of a trend towards nuclear families, alcohol abuse, financial instability and family disfunction, a growing population of the aged, failure of crops, huge debt burdens, growing costs of cultivation and shrinking yields.\textsuperscript{22} Table 3.12 shows the incidence and rates of Male/Female suicides in Kerala.
Table No.3.12

INCIDENCE & RATE OF MALE/FEMALE SUICIDES IN KERALA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated Mid year Population (1,00,000 s)</th>
<th>Suicide incidence</th>
<th>Suicide Rate (per 1,00,000 of population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>154.9</td>
<td>164.1</td>
<td>319.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>157.5</td>
<td>167.4</td>
<td>324.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>158.7</td>
<td>169.1</td>
<td>327.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>170.8</td>
<td>330.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>161.3</td>
<td>172.5</td>
<td>333.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>162.6</td>
<td>174.2</td>
<td>336.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the Table 3.12 it is clear that the rate of suicide Suicide Rate per 1,00,000 of population is in a reducing trend. Again it can found that from 2000, incidence of suicide rose by 17 per cent; then shows a gradual decrease.

According to Kerala State Mental Health Authority 2010, suicide is maximum in the age group of 30 to 59 years (61.9 percentage). Family suicides
claims 56 lives during 2010 as against 38 in 2009 all over the state causing an increase. Even though the male–female suicide ratio is 2.8:1 in 2010, but attempted suicide is more among women compared to men. This also shows to empowerment of women in this regard.

The social, economic and political empowerment of women is the basis of any sustainable strategy of national development. There can be no justice, equality or comprehensive economic development in societies, which deny human rights, including the rights of women. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Efforts to mainstream women in Politics must be a continuous process by which, regardless of reservations, communities become supportive to women leaders capable of taking over the local governance functions.

The Kerala economy is a money oriented economy. Various programmes and projects are implemented here for the development of women and these are the providers of employment to women. Having a job can help women to remove themselves from a negative environment and add to their economic freedom and independence. Women need to strike a balance between their family and work life. There is a greater need for the society and the family to accept and tolerate the successes and careers of women. Economic independence creates problem to their male counterparts which lead to conflicts in their family.

Governments of various countries including India are taking up necessary steps to reduce the rate of divorce and to save marriages. Delhi, the capital city of India, witnessed that the divorce rate doubled in five years. Bangalore, a very hi-tech city in India, experienced that the divorce rate tripled in 4 years. These are very shocking statistics, given the background, that the country is one of the
most traditional places on the globe. It is being gauged that the magnification in
the number of divorce cases has occurred due to reasons such as work pressure
and stress, economical security, haphazard working hours, lack of time to spend
in the house with family and financial freedom. The awareness of the concept of
living in a healthy and close knit family is the probable solution to lessen the
increasing rate of divorce.\(^{25}\)

The Indian women are getting educated and becoming capable of
earning. They have developed the power to spend money and gain knowledge
of their rights. Rapid urbanization and awareness of various rights are also
instigating the divorce rate to shoot up. Financially self sufficient and educated
women are now open to the option of ending the relationship rather than to bear
life long abuses silently. They have become independent and consequently
reluctant to adjust with the traditional views of their counterparts. The Indian
women do not want to continue the same old rut that has persisted for centuries
in the country. The campaigns on gender equality are now giving rise to ego
clashes between the husband and wife, especially if the wife too is the bread
winner of the family. As they desire to explore more opportunities and
experiment with this newly acquired independence, the divorce rate in India is
increasing.\(^{26}\)

Torture, harassment and violence against women carried over to the
present time with greater intensity and different form of violences such as Rape,
Kidnapping, Dowry death and harassment, immoral trafficking etc. Crimes
against women are occurring in Kerala with an alarming regularity. Indian women
are also being increasingly victimized. As per the State Crime Record Bureau,
Trivandrum, the number of atrocities against women in Kerala which stood at
7228 in 2003 has increased to 7681 and 8087 in 2004 and 2005 respectively and it again shot up to 9706 in 2008, 9354 in 2009, 10781 in 2010 and 6604 in June 2011 indicating the dire need for social empowerment to the women folk of the state as well as the whole country.

High level literacy leads to high expectation with regard to job avenues. Once it become unattainable they will be highly frustrated and depressed. Kerala State Mental Health Authority draws a poignant picture of the state which has an increasing trend in suicides among females between the age 15-30 years. Mental health is another issue of women of the state which experience higher degrees of mental stress and anxiety and lower mental well-being compared to the men. This calls for a gender sensitive approach to mental health care.

Atrocities against women have increased in Kerala by a whopping 338.40 percent in the 15-year period starting from 1992.

Kerala woman is suffering from mental disorders mainly due to social, economic, cultural and gender related stresses. There is a visible increase in the number of women going to psychiatrists with depression and other mental disorders caused by social and economic reasons. A field survey of stress among keraliets 2002 shows that 69.19 percentage stress arise from financial problem which ranks first second rank relates to anxiety and third position goes to health. To overcome mental disorders mental empowerment is needed to the concerned depressed.

Women work longer hours and contribute significantly in term of total labour energy spent by the household members. On account of deeply entrenched social customs, taboos and prejudices, women’s work continues to be invisible and less rewarding activities. The extent of women’s contribution is
aptly highlighted by a micro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas which found that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year.\textsuperscript{31}

In recent years many steps have been taken so as to increase the participation of women in the political system. The women reservation policy bill is however a very sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in parliament. Further there is a panchayati Raj System, where women have been given representation and they are elected to the village council level. However their power is restricted, as the men wield all authority. Their decisions are often overruled by the Government machinery. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women empowerment still has a long way to go. Therefore a clear vision needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women emancipation both from the government and women themselves.

Employment of women is essential to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. Women employment assures stability of the society. Women must organize to survive and succeed.\textsuperscript{32} Achievements of women pave way to the progress and development of our nation. Therefore empowerment of women in the State of Kerala need much attention in this context.
References:

3. Ibid.


21/ Kerala State mental Authority http://www.ksmha.org//suicide.
