

of a higher level statistical analysis like Factor Analysis. This has been attempted in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

WORK PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

3.1 Introduction

The world profile on women reveals that they constitute about one-half of the world population and one-third of the recorded labour force. Participation in labour force varies among cultures, across age groups and between sexes. Census or labour force surveys in different settings across the globe highlight relatively low labour force participation rate of women vis-à-vis men and significant variation in female participation rate among countries.

However, the contribution of women to the national economies of many Third World Countries has largely been ignored in economic calculus. Their economic contribution to household, farm/off-farm, community and nation is always undervalued and quite often overlooked altogether. Neglect of women's involvement in production process is detrimental to economic development. Much of the labour contributed by them is not usually considered as productive. The statisticians as well as planners do not record their work properly. As a developing country, India is no exception to the general rule.

The relatively low levels of work participation rates among women in India can be explained in relation to the conceptual and measurement related problems implicit in the identification of women within the labour force. In most of the subsistence economies, there is a deliberate exclusion of a whole range of activities performed by women from the purview of gainful employment. Striking a similar view, Hirway (1993) is of the opinion that underestimation of women's work is particularly observed in four general areas of activity, namely subsistence production, informal paid work, domestic work and voluntary work.

Although women have entered many male dominated professions, their representation in the higher echelons of society and in positions of decision-making is much below than that of men.

3.2 Women Work Participation

During the last two decades there have been some significant changes in women's work participation especially during 1980s both in the developed and developing countries. Participation of women in the labour force has increased worldwide during the past few decades. In developed countries, it increased from around 38 percent in 1970s to around 45 percent in 1990s and in developing countries it increased from around 20 percent to around 30 percent during the same period. In the 21st century, opportunities for women have started increasing manifold as the world is fast moving towards more dependence on tertiary activities. There is a considerable increase in the work force participation of women in most countries of the world. However, the male participation rate has either stagnated or declined; the change in labour market condition is so

perceptible that instead of marginalization, the process of global feminisation in certain categories of work especially in agriculture is said to have been occurring.

It is true that the process of feminisation has diversified the work opportunities of women. However, it brought several adverse consequences also for women workers in terms of earning and working conditions. Under such circumstances, it is important to understand the process of change concerning women's work and its implications in a correct perspective, which may help to devise an appropriate policy intervention. Such an approach also helps in "giving input to the ongoing voluntary action and movement for the betterment of the work scenario of women" (Jane, 1990).

In spite of all such positive points, two major factors affect the status of women in work participation. They are (1) Conceptual measurement related problems which do not portray the actual scenario about women workers (2) Rigid notions about relative gender roles prevailing in the traditional societies, especially in their cultural perceptions.

Levels of economic activity among women have been found to be concomitant with the process of economic development and social progress (Durand, 1965). Sadie (1965) had expressed the opinion about the existence of a U-shaped curve depicting the relationship between female work participation and the course of development. Evidence for the U-shaped pattern of the female labour force participation rate is based on both the historical experience of developed countries and the studies on cross-country data. For instance, in the United States, female labor force participation fell during the initial stages of economic growth and it began

to rise thereafter exhibiting a U-shaped pattern. However lower levels of economic activity among females are observed in most of the transitional, developing societies in Asia and Latin America (United Nations, 1965).

Since the pioneering works of Mincer (1962) and Cain (1966) the analysis of female labour force participation has been the subject of intensive research in recent years. Since most women are actually employed in some kind of productive/reproductive work, whether or not this is recognised and quantified by statistics; the issues relating female employment are qualitatively different from those of male employment. This makes the study of work participation by women a more complex matter than is often recognised.

The importance of women's work generally receives marginal treatment simply because a large volume of the work regularly performed is "invisible" in terms of market criteria or even in terms of socially dominant perceptions of what constitutes "work". This obviously matters because it leads to the social underestimation of women's productive contribution. Even more importantly, as a result, inadequate attention is typically devoted to the conditions of women's work and their implications for the general material conditions and well-being of women.

Women's participation in modern sector work is a step ahead of any other type of paid employment. Women's participation in paid employment has been found to be highly related to their status, because it shows the tendency among women to earn a living or to augment the family's income by working for others.

One of the salient features of last century was a paradigm shift in the economic activities from manufacturing sector to service sector, which is

from secondary sector to tertiary sector. Since service sector is concerned primarily with consumers, opportunities for work participation for women have increased manifold. Women have always been major sources of service sector work, but they have not always been classified as engaged in service sector employment, because much of the work they typically perform comes into the category of unpaid labour, performed within the household or local community. The care economy dominates in such work: thus, all activities such as cooking and cleaning for household members, care of the young, the old and the sick, provisioning of necessary goods (such as fetching water and fuel wood in rural areas) are typically seen as the responsibility of women members of the household in most Asian economies. It is only recently that women's involvement in paid services has increased across Asia. While there has been some increase in women's share of paid employment in the formal sector (especially in public employment) in general, women workers tend to be concentrated into the lower paid and more informal types of service activity.

Women's economic productivity is a critical factor, as the dependence of the family on their contribution to household resources increases with the poverty status of the household (Mahapatra, 2003). Thus, it has been maintained that women should be made more productive and hence more effective income earner. This will reduce their dependency on male members of the family and enhance their status in the social set up. It also helps in reducing fertility, slow down population growth, improving child health and nutrition status and bestows greater decision making power on the women. They in turn increase aggregate labour productivity and ensure speedy growth in key economic sectors (World Bank, 1991; Gopalan, 1995).

The report entitled “Global employment trends for women-March 2008” released by International Labour Organisation (ILO) puts the number of employed women at 1.2 billion in 2007; a growth of 200 million over the last decade as compared to the male counterpart which stands at 1.8 billion. However, the report also gave a staggering data in which unemployment in women reached to 81.6 million from 70.2 million during the same period. The report throwing light on various conditions pertaining to women workforce said that though more women are working than ever before, they are also more likely to get low productivity, low payment and vulnerable jobs with no social protection or basic rights.

3.3 Women Workers in India

The total population of India increased from 837 million to 1015 million between 1991 and 2001 while the number of workers during the corresponding year increased from 314 million to 399 million. In percentage terms between 1991 and 2001, the population increased by 21.2 percent and the workers by 27.2 percent. While the net addition of male population between 1991 and 2001 was to the order of 91 million (20.8 percent) the net addition of male workers was 49 million, registering an increase of 21.8percent. It would, however, be interesting to note that the percentage increase in the female workers between 1991 and 2001 was a whopping 40.6 percent when the female population during the corresponding period increased only by 21.7 percent. Significantly higher rate of growth of female workers as compared to the growth of female population clearly brings out better capture of women’s work at the Census 2001 especially in certain parts of the country.

In a recent study covering over 40 countries, sex dominated occupations have been defined as those where workers of one sex constitutes more than 80 percent of the work force (Anker 1998). It is also found that women workers are employed in a narrower range of occupations while men are differentiated into a wider range of occupations. This is one of the restricting factors which reduce the scope for upward mobility of women.

The majority of Indian women are engaged in work through the unorganised or informal sector. This means that there is no job security, no assurance of fair wages and there is no one to monitor work conditions. In addition, even as women work in paid, underpaid or unpaid work, their choices are restricted, particularly if they are poor and uneducated. Even in the United States, a recent survey established that out of 500 occupations, one third of the women were concentrated in just 10 occupations that included teaching, nursing and bookkeeping.

3.4 Women Workers in Kerala

Within India, the State of Kerala has carved out a separate niche for itself in development discourse due to its impressive performance over the years in the demographic and social development front. Much has been written about Kerala's high level of female literacy, custom of matrilineal inheritance, political achievement regarding decentralized governance and commitment towards social welfare, high levels of life expectancy, low infant mortality and cohesive social structure promoting effective interpersonal channels of communication (Bhatt and Rajan, 1990; Kannan, 1990; Kumar, 1995). Such achievements in social development have led to

the emergence of the so-called 'Kerala-Model' of development. However it is certainly paradoxical that in such a society well acknowledged for according higher status and position to women, participation of the women in the labour force has been consistently on a decline. Women constitute a major part of the lowest paid categories of workers which includes traditional industries, household labour, Anganwadi teachers, Micro enterprise unit of Kudumbasree members etc. (KSSP, 2006)

Kerala, which ranks first among the Indian States in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI), presents, however, a poor picture in terms of female work participation. This is paradoxical since the development experience of the State is universally acclaimed as a 'model' for poor States to follow for transforming the living conditions of their people, through 'enlightened' policies of promotion of health care and education. However, the most tragic failure of development in the State is the acute unemployment and low labour force participation rates of both men and women. Educated unemployment is even more severe. For example, between 1996 and 2005 number of persons with more than SSLC qualification and who have registered for employment increased from 14.6 to 23.5 percent. This clearly indicates that improvement in literacy and education has in no way improved the employment situation in the state.

Yet another notion is that education improves the employment opportunities of a woman and raises her earning potential. But the experience of Kerala is different. In spite of a comparatively higher female literacy much of the women work participation in Kerala is in the primary sector especially in the agricultural sector. In such a situation, with increasing level of education there is a tendency to move away from

primary sector. Consequently, the women work participation rate declines because in other sectors, employment opportunities are low and there is tough competition also. Thus, it may be said that in Kerala there is an inverse relationship between level of education and female employment.

The rapid expansion of higher education in the State and the consequent steady increase in the supply of graduates swell the reservoir of educated unemployment in the State. There are distinct differences in job preferences between educated and uneducated persons. It seems that the improvement in the educational levels of women in Kerala have created in them strong preference for white collar and salaried jobs and reduced their willingness to take up manual work. Preference for salaried employment and aversion to self-employment among educated job seekers of Kerala were documented in a few recent studies. However, the fact is that even the uneducated have strong job preferences based on factors such as social status, class-consciousness and the resulting inter-linkages in the social hierarchy. The expectation of the reward of a government job is so high that people are ready to remain unemployed for years, waiting for the opportunity to acquire a government appointment (Mathew, 1997).

Hence, people of Kerala have an inclination to migrate to other countries in search of jobs. Kerala has the highest proportion of population working outside the country (Zachariah, 2002). Women's inability to migrate puts them in a disadvantageous position in the labour market. It denies them access to the increased number of jobs available abroad and hence limits their employment opportunities.

Kerala has one of the lowest levels of per capita income in the country, as well as the highest levels of unemployment (State Planning

Board: 2003). While the State accounts for only 4 percent of India's population, its unemployment rate is high at 31 percent, with 14 percent of males and 48 percent of the females in the State being unemployed (NSSO: 2000). It is also identified that the number of young men and women registered as work seekers in employment exchanges has gone up sharply during the last couple of decades.

Today the problem of unemployment is the single largest puzzle of Kerala economy. Unemployment is said to prevail when supply of labour exceeds its demand. That is unemployment exists, if all able bodied men are not able to work at the existing wage rate. Growth of supply of labour is determined by population growth and participation of population on the total workforce. In Kerala from 1970 onwards there has been a rapid rise in the labour supply because of the increase in the number of women seeking wage employment. Thus, though the supply of work seekers increased, the demand for them did not increase. Consequently, there was an alarming increase in unemployment rate from time to time.

The unemployment problem in Kerala is not only about educational unemployment but also simple unemployment of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. This is the highest in the country and on the rise, too. One important feature of Kerala economy which makes it different from the rest of the country, is the net out migration of labour force particularly to Gulf region and inflow of huge remittances into the State. Huge out migration, as has been rightly pointed out, happens mainly because of lack of employment opportunity at the local level.

3.5 Women Work Seekers

Table 3.1 shows the status of women work seekers in Kerala. It may be seen that on the whole, there has been an increase in the percentage of women work seekers from 25.3 percent in 2000 to 26.2 percent in 2004. However, education has brought a slight deviation to the number of women work seekers. During the same period a marginal decline was noticed among the educated women work seekers in Kerala. This means that the

Table 3.1
Kerala – Women Work Seekers 2000-2004

Year	Percentage Women Work Seekers	Percentage Educated Women Work Seekers
2000	25.3	27.1
2001	25.9	28.1
2002	25.9	26.8
2003	26.0	26.6
2004	26.2	25.8

Source: - Economic Review 2008

Employment opportunities for educated women in Kerala have become slightly better than in the earlier years. As mentioned earlier the preference of women for white collar jobs or salaried jobs may be a reason for this since consumer services including education have increased rapidly in the State opening new vistas for educated women job seekers.

3.6 Education and Work Participation

Table 3.2 clearly exhibits the gender gap in work participation of educated males and females in Kerala and India during 2004-05. It shows that work participation rate in rural Kerala is considerably lower than that of rural India in all categories of educational levels except in the male upper primary level and female graduates. The urban situation is

comparatively better for the State, particularly for women workers in all levels except for the diploma and certificate holders. Gender gap is more for India except a few cases. In the case of Kerala gender gap is more for Diploma/ Certificate holders for both rural and urban areas, and also for upper primary rural cases.

Table 3.2
Education Specific Work Participation Rate for Persons of Age
15 years and above - 2004-05

Level of Education	Kerala		India		Kerala		India	
	Rural		Rural		Urban		urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	61.82	33.3	89.2	55.0	63.9	30.4	83.1	30.4
Up to LP	81.9	38.1	89.5	44.9	75.7	28.7	85.5	23.4
UP	82.0	32.6	80.2	37.1	81.3	20.1	76.0	16.1
Secondary	69.2	26.2	73.2	30.5	64.0	17.4	67.3	12.3
Higher Secondary	53.9	14.7	70.9	25.2	47.9	13.0	60.8	12.9
Diploma/ Certificate	81.7	46.6	82.1	52.3	81.6	40.4	79.8	48.6
Graduate & Above	78.8	45.9	85.1	34.5	79.7	42.9	79.5	29.0

Source: - Economic Review 2008

3.7 Sources of Women Employment

If one considers the sources of employment for women, two major groups that provide employment opportunities are the public sector and private sector. Even here men outnumber women with sizeable margin. As per the data for 1999, only 30 percent of public sector employees are women while the share of them in private sector is still lower at 23.4 percent (Table 3.3). It is also pertinent to note that sector wise variations exist in the women work participation rate. While this rate is 20 percent for

Central Government sector it is 40 percent for State Government. If we consider the Quasi Government sector the share is 23 percent and 30 percent for Central Government and State Government respectively. There is not much improvement in the situation even today.

Table: 3.3
Kerala – Public and Private Sector Employment -1999

Sl.no	Districts	Public sector Employment	% Women	Private sector Employment	% Women
1	Thiruvananthapuram	38871	28.26	25156	13.59
2	Kollam	24028	48.27	37568	37.86
3	Pathanamthitta	9232	35.14	7508	17.85
4	Alapuzha	11664	35.64	11188	18.85
5	Kottayam	11057	32.31	9305	15.00
6	Idukki	4248	25.83	42113	43.08
7	Ernakulam	20673	22.81	22319	14.05
8	Thrissur	18611	36.08	27081	25.57
9	Palakkad	10565	20.83	10738	14.06
10	Malappuram	10627	31.70	13719	21.64
11	Kozhikode	11778	26.37	17058	19.23
12	Wayanad	3536	25.63	9023	29.58
13	Kannur	10978	30.94	22524	25.40
14	Kasargod	5690	33.85	28249	52.91
15	Total	191558	30.20	283549	23.41

Source: Directorate of Employment & Training, Thiruvananthapuram 2001.

After 1990, Panchayati Raj institutions have become more important. They play a major role in bringing the development process at micro level. Contribution of women in the Panchayat level activities is considerably increased recently after the introduction of 30 percent seats reserved for women in the local bodies.

Spatially the work participation varies among the different districts of Kerala with regard to public and private sector. Kollam district records

the highest percent share of women in public sector employment which is about 48.3 percent. This is mainly due to the large number of coir and cashew industries in the public sector, in which majority of the women are working. In addition to this in Pathanamthitta, Alapuzha, Thrissur, Kasargod, Kottayam, Kannur and Malappuram women representation in public sector undertaking is more than the State average. Lowest percent share of women in public sector employment is in Palakkad. Palakkad being the agriculturally important district public sector institutions are comparatively low and women are mainly employed in agricultural sector. Next lowest rank is for Ernakulam. Ernakulam is one of the industrially developed districts of the State but majority of the employees are male members.

In private sector the position of women is comparatively poor and only less than one-fourth of the employment is for women. Highest share of women in private sector employment is found in Kasargod and the next importance goes to Idukki. Both of these districts are underdeveloped compared to other districts. The lowest number of private sector employment for women is shown in Thiruvananthapuram (13.6 percent). It shows that private sector is also dominated by male members. Other districts with lower women employment in private sector are Palakkad, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alapuzha and Malappuram (Table 3.3).

3.8 Census Classification of Workers

The 2001 Census first divided the population into workers and non-workers based on whether they have worked at all during the past one year preceding the census enumeration, which is taken as the 'reference period'. The workers are then classified into main workers and marginal workers.

The former category includes those who had worked for 6 (six) months or more and the latter includes all those who worked for less than 6 months. Thus the population is categorized into three mutually exclusive groups: Main Workers, Marginal Workers and Non-workers. The main aim in this section is to study the trend of work participation rate in Palakkad, block wise for three decades, i.e.1971, 1991and 2001.

In the 1971 and 1991 Census, workers were categorized into nine occupational categories, viz.

I. Cultivators.

II. Agricultural Labourers

III. Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, Plantation, Orchards and Allied activities

IV. Mining and Quarrying

V. Manufacturing and Repairs;

a) Household Industries

b) Other than Household Industries

VI. Construction

VII. Trade and Commerce

VIII.Transport, Storage and Communication.

IX. Services

However, in 2001, a four-fold classification of workers has been carried out: Cultivators, Agricultural labourers, Workers in Household Industry and Other Workers. This four-fold classification involves a reorganization of definitions and concepts, which should be kept in mind while interpreting and understanding the data. According to the Census 2001, cultivators include persons engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from government or private persons or institutions for payment in

money, kind or share. Cultivators are persons who involve in ploughing, sowing, harvesting and production of cereals, millets and other crops, such as sugarcane, tobacco, groundnuts, fibre crops, medicinal and aromatic plants. This category also includes activities such as fruit growing, vegetable growing or keeping orchards. The term Cultivators, as per the Census does not include cultivation of crops like tea, coffee, rubber, coconut and betel arecanut. It should be carefully noted that in the 1991 Census, in addition to the crops, fruits, medicinal plants, flowers, vegetables, roots and tubers and spices were also excluded. However these later aspects were included in the 2001 definition. This remains a limitation in the comparison attempted.

The second category, agricultural labourers, includes persons who work in another person's land for wages, in cash or kind of share. Such a person has no risk in cultivation as well as has no right of lease or contract the land.

A household industry is defined as an industry conducted by one or more members of the household at home or within the village in rural areas and only within the precincts of the house where the household lives in urban areas. The larger proportion of workers in the household industry should consist of household members. The industry should not be run on the scale of a registered factory which would qualify to be registered under the Indian Factories Act. All workers, other than cultivators, agricultural labourers or workers in the household industry are classified as other workers.

Due to such differences in classification of workers in 1971, 1991 and 2001, it has to rearrange the nine categories of workers in 1971 and 1991 into the four categories as explained above, along the lines of the

definitions provided, to facilitate comparison and analyse shifts in sectoral composition of work on a spatial perspective and to analyse the work participation. Hence, for the present analysis only the four types of workers as given in 2001 Census are considered. The 1971 and 1991 classification has been suitably amalgamated for this purpose.

3.9 Work Participation Rate and Gender Gap

Workforce participation rate, a useful measure of economic activity is computed as the ratio of total workers to the total population, expressed as a percentage. It provides an idea about the participation of the population in economic activities. Census 2001 reveals that Kerala has the lowest workforce participation rate among females among all the major States in India. The total workforce in Kerala according to the 2001 Census estimate is around 10.3 million out of which 7.8 million are males and only 2.5 millions are females. The work participation of women analysed in this section is primarily based on the data collected from the Census reports for the corresponding years.

The concept of 'work', as defined in the Census of India has been broadly the same in the past five censuses, but the scope of the definition has been extended from time to time. In the 2001 Census, a set of five questions was canvassed to collect information on the details of work. As such, work has been defined as participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages or profit. Such participation may be physical and/or mental in nature. Work involves not only actual work but also includes effective supervision and direction of work. It even includes part time help or unpaid work on farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity (Census of India: 2001).

In Table 3.4, a comparative estimate of Work Participation Rate (WPR) for India, Kerala and Palakkad in 1971, 1991 and 2001 are given. In 2001 it can be seen that Male Workforce Participation Rate in Kerala is 42 percent compared to the national estimates of 52 percent. However, the study area has work participation more than the state average. For females, national average is much higher in 2001, compared to the Kerala's rate and Palakkad shows a value in between. Furthermore, the national average for females has increased considerably between 1971 and 1991 and again between 1991 and 2001 there was an increase in the rate. But the rate of increase is much higher in the first period.

Table 3.4
Work Participation Rate

	Male			Female		
	1971	1991	2001	1971	1991	2001
India	52.5	51.6	51.9	11.9	22.3	25.7
Kerala	45.0	44.8	41.8	13.5	12.2	10.9
Palakkad	49.1	46.6	44.4	23.4	20.1	15.2

Source: Census of India; Kerala Series: 1971, 1991 & 2001

In the case of Kerala also there is a increase decrease in the work participation rate. When looking into the figures for Palakkad, the rate was very high in 1971 (23.4) compared to the State and national value. One notable aspect is that the rate of female work participation in Palakkad is decreasing continuously but the rate of decrease is only marginal for the first period, but for the second period the rate of decrease is more. Factors such as decline in area under agriculture, small and marginal nature of agricultural holdings, decline in traditional and rural industries and changes

in occupational preference of young rural labour force contributed to the declining female work participation in Palakkad.

In Kerala, the difference between the male and female participation rate has increased between 1991 and 2001. The increasing gender gap is due to the increase of male work participation and a corresponding decrease for females. Decrease in female participation in economic activities is mainly due to the set back in agriculture especially food crops like rice and tapioca. The introduction of Kerala Agricultural Labourers Act (1974) is a major turning point, because it made mandatory for fixed wages to be paid to agricultural labourers. Being a labour intensive crop, rice cultivation was affected. Area under rice declined substantially from 145000 hectares in 1991 to 111000 hectares in 2001. Consequently the women agricultural labourers were affected more. A brief analysis of the nature of gender gap in the work participation is warranted here.

Table 3.5

Comparative Gender Gap in Work Participation Rate

	1971	1991	2001
India	40.6	29.3	26.2
Kerala	31.5	32.6	30.9
Palakkad	25.7	25.5	29.2

Source: Census Reports, 1971, 1991 & 2001

It may be observed that the gender gap in the work participation for India as a whole has been decreasing between 1971 and 2001 (Table 3.5). In the case of Kerala and Palakkad there seems to be fluctuating gender gap. However, between 1991 and 2001 Palakkad have shown an increase in the gender gap. This is mainly due to the decrease in the female work

participation and increase in the male work participation. In addition, wide divergence exists between male and female participation in various economic activities. As far as Kerala is concerned, it may be noted that female work participation is only about one-third of male work participation in all the times of the study. This is contrary to the general trend observed in other South Indian States (Table 3.6). In all the three major South Indian States the female work participation rate is much above than that of Kerala and even more than the national average. The total work participation is also much lower in Kerala compared to the national as well as the south Indian states.

Table 3.6

Work Participation Rates in Southern States and India

	1971			1991			2001		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Andhra Pradesh	41.4	58.2	24.2	45.1	55.5	34.3	45.8	56.2	35.1
Karnataka	34.7	54.4	14.2	42.0	54.1	29.4	44.5	56.6	32.0
Tamil Nadu	35.8	56.0	15.1	43.3	56.4	29.9	44.7	58.9	31.3
Kerala	29.1	45.0	13.5	31.4	47.6	15.9	32.3	50.6	15.3
India	32.9	52.5	11.9	37.5	51.6	22.3	39.3	51.9	25.7

The factors that led to the decline in female work participation rate include the structural changes of employment in the State. Several labour-intensive activities such as rice cultivation and traditional cottage industries have been declining in Kerala. These have been the two areas in which most of the women workers are employed. To illustrate this point, it may be noted that the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses and of paddy fields to cultivation of commercial crops had reduced women workforce in the agricultural sector from 41.7 per cent in 1991 to 21.3 percent in 2001. The crisis in the cottage industries led to a fall in women's

workforce from 7.7 per cent to 5.9 per cent during the same period. It was also observed that around 82 per cent of the educated men were employed; the corresponding proportion among women was only 71 per cent.

Thus, structural transformation of women's economic activity is notable in the State with primary activity as loser and tertiary sector the gainer. However, more recent data from the NSSO shows a steadying of work participation rates for women in rural areas and an increase in the urban work participation in Kerala. Among the educated, the unemployment rate was the lowest for technically and professionally trained persons such as diploma holders and professionals. It was much higher for females than for males for all categories of education and very high among unmarried females; about three fourths of the unmarried females remained unemployed. The rate was high among widows and divorced or separated women too (*Kerala Development Report, Planning Commission, Government of India 2008*).

3.10 Work Participation Rate in Palakkad

3.10.1 Overall Work Participation Rate

Out of the 14 districts of Kerala, Palakkad strikes a different note as far as work participation is concerned. In 1971 Palakkad with a work participation of 35.9 percent ranked first among the various districts of Kerala. However, reorganization and creation of new districts made Palakkad to slip to third rank in the subsequent periods. The male work participation was the highest in Palakkad in 1971, but in the subsequent years other districts overtook the ranking of Palakkad. However, in female work participation till 1991 Palakkad ranked first. Between 1991 and

2001 though there is a notable decline, still Palakkad ranked second among the districts of Kerala.

Even in Palakkad, the pattern of work participation varies from one block to another. Table 3.7 shows the block wise work participation rate for Palakkad district. It may be seen that in 1971 about 36 percent of the total population formed the main workers. However, the rate varies from 28.8 percent to 43.5 percent among the blocks. Out of 13 blocks, Chittur, Attappady, Kollengode, Kuzhalmannam, Malampuzha, Alathur and Nenmara have a higher work participation than the district. It should be noted that rice cultivation is dominant in all the blocks except Attappady. Chittur has the highest work participation while Pattambi has the lowest. Even though Attappady is not a rice cultivating area, agriculture is the only major economic activity there. Being a forested tribal area, this block also has the lowest population density. On the whole, in 1971 work participation rate is higher in the eastern part and decreases towards the central part of the district. When one moves further west the rate decreases more (Fig. 3.1)

Table 3.7
Palakkad District – Work Participation Rate
1971 – 2001

Blocks	Work Participation Rate					
	1971	1991	Change 1971& 91	2001	Change 1991& 01	Change Between 1971& 01
Alathur	38.15	35.76	-2.39	32.57	-3.19	-5.58
Attappady	42.01	45.35	3.34	36.35	-9.00	-5.66
Chittur	43.49	42.29	-1.20	38.9	-3.39	-4.59
Kollengode	40.02	38.29	-1.73	34.72	-3.57	-5.30
Kuzhalmannam	40.20	37.52	-2.68	33.18	-4.34	-7.02
Malampuzha	39.69	37.27	-2.42	34.87	-2.40	-4.82
Mannarkkad	33.39	29.63	-3.76	25.35	-4.28	-8.04
Nenmara	41.23	38.38	-2.85	33.37	-5.01	-7.86
Ottappalam	32.38	29.14	-3.24	25.93	-3.21	-6.45
Palakkad	33.02	31.71	-1.31	29.71	-2.00	-3.31

Pattambi	28.80	22.99	-5.81	20.64	-2.35	-8.16
Srikrishnapuram	32.27	28.98	-3.29	25.24	-3.74	-7.03
Thrithala	31.24	26.61	-4.63	23.32	-3.29	-7.92
Palakkad District	35.89	33.08	-2.81	29.36	-3.72	-6.53

Source: Census of India; Kerala Series: 1971, 1991 & 2001

In 1991 work participation declined marginally for the district as a whole. All the blocks also have indicated a decline in work participation rate. Ranking of the blocks also remain almost the same as in 1971. The only exception is Attappady where there is a marginal increase in work participation rate making it to have the highest share among the blocks. Work participation rate declined further between 1991 and 2001 and this trend is noticed in all the blocks. Attappady also showed drastic decline in work participation between 1991 and 2001. Pattern and rank with regard to work participation rate remained almost the same in 2001 also.

Between 1991 and 2001 Pattambi and Mannarkkad have shown a decline of more than 8 percent which is well above the average change for district (6.5%) as a whole. Thrithala, Srikrishnapuram, Nenmara and Kuzhalmannam also have exhibited a higher rate of decline than the district. Among the blocks Palakkad has shown the lowest change between 1971 and 2001. As district headquarters, Palakkad block has a concentration of service sector activities and this may be a factor for the lowest change.

3.10.2 Female Work Participation Rate

As against the general national trend, female work participation rate in Palakkad and Kerala is decreasing and the rate is much lower when compared with the male work participation. However, Palakkad is better placed with other districts of Kerala. When compared with the State and

National average Palakkad is close to the national average. It was only about 23.4 percent in 1971 and has decreased to 20.2 percent in 1991 (Table 3.6). The decreasing trend is mainly due to the decrease in female agricultural workers and there is no corresponding increase in the workers in other sectors.

In 1971, only 23.4 percent of females were workers in Palakkad district. Of the 13 blocks, Chittur, Nenmara, Kuzhalmannam, Kollengode, Malampuzha and Alathur have a higher share of female work participation rate. On the whole, the female work participation rate varied between a maximum of 32.6 percent to a minimum of 13.5 percent. Chittur has the highest work participation rate while Pattambi has the lowest (Table 3.8). The blocks have almost the same pattern of ranking for female work participation rate like that of Total work participation rate discussed earlier. It may be noted that the female work participation is the highest in the southeastern part of the district (Fig. 3.2). It declines towards northwest and west. Here also the western blocks show a lower work participation rate.

Between 1971 and 1991 female work participation rate declined from 23.4 percent to 20.2 percent. Similar to the total work participation, here also all the blocks show a declining trend except Attappady, which had a phenomenal increase of 11.3 percent. It is pertinent to note that the total population of Attappady block had increased from 39183 to 62034 during the same period. The Silent Valley reserve forest of Karuvarakundu village of Ernad taluk of Malappuram district is added to the Pudur village of Attappady block during 1981-91 period. The tribal people of this area are an addition to the population. This may be one of the reasons for the increase in the population. As a highland area this region might have developed more plantations and might have attracted more migrant

labourers. This may also be the reason for the phenomenal increase in both total and female work participation rate. All other blocks record a negative change with the maximum value of 4.9 in Thrithala. Srikrishnapuram, Malampuzha, Mannarkkad, Ottappalam and Palakkad also have a decreasing rate than the district average.

Table 3.8
Palakkad District – Female Work Participation
1971 – 2001

Blocks/District	1971	1991	Change	2001	Change	Change between 1971&2001
Alathur	27.85	25.17	-2.68	19.37	-5.80	-8.48
Attappady	22.13	33.41	11.28	23.76	-9.65	1.63
Chittur	32.84	31.50	-1.34	26.30	-5.20	-6.54
Kollengode	28.07	26.19	-1.88	20.85	-5.34	-7.22
Kuzhalmannam	31.26	28.36	-2.90	21.17	-7.19	-10.09
Malampuzha	28.05	24.13	-3.92	20.07	-4.06	-7.98
Mannarkkad	18.28	14.53	-3.75	09.63	-4.90	-8.65
Nenmara	32.64	29.61	-3.03	22.30	-7.31	-10.34
Ottappalam	20.19	16.55	-3.64	12.30	-4.25	-7.89
Palakkad	19.86	16.91	-2.95	13.48	-3.43	-6.38
Pattambi	13.48	9.82	-3.66	06.91	-2.91	-6.57
Srikrishnapuram	19.23	15.16	-4.07	10.97	-4.19	-8.26
Thrithala	17.39	12.49	-4.90	08.31	-4.18	-9.08
Palakkad District	23.42	20.24	-3.18	15.23	-5.01	-8.19

Source: Census of India; Kerala Series: 1971, 1991 & 2001

In 2001 Chittur block regained the highest rank with 26.8 percent, followed by Attappady. However, the average value is only 15.2 and Pattambi, Thrithala, Mannarkkad, Srikrishnapuram, Ottappalam and Palakkad blocks have a lower rate of work participation than this. These blocks are located in the western part of the district and are comparatively developed. The maximum change was in Attappady (9.7%) followed by Kuzhalmannam, Kollengode, Nenmara, Alathur and Chittur. All these

blocks are located in the southern part of the district and these are predominantly rice growing areas. This gives an indication that the decline in female work participation rate is higher in the area where rice cultivation is predominant and the work participation is low in the comparatively developed parts of the district.

In 1991 and 2001 there is not much variation in the spatial pattern of female work participation to that of the total work participation. It is the highest in the north and eastern part with Attappady and Chittur showing a higher female work participation rate. The rate decreases towards the central and western part of the district. The lowest rate is in the extreme western blocks like Thrithala, Pattambi, Srikrishnapuram and Mannarkkad.

Between 1991 and 2001 the rate of change for the study area has increased to 5 percent, which was only 3.2 percent in the previous period. One important point noticed is the rate of decrease is more in the eastern part, just reverse to that of the previous period. Above the average rate is recorded in Attappady, Kuzhalmannam, Nenmara, Alathur, Chittur and Kollengode. Lowest decrease of 2.9 percent is in Pattambi and the nearby blocks like Thrithala and Srikrishnapuram also record lower rates than the average rate. Current trend across the blocks indicate that female work participation has come down sharply all over district in the last decade.

3.11 Conclusion

Discussions made so far pertain to the overall total work participation rate and the overall female work participation rate. However the women workers are distributed in different sectors. As already noted the 2001 census identified four major sectors of main workers. This is