PREFACE

Women, who constitute half of the population, perform all kinds of duties supporting men in each and every stage of life. Active participation of women in economic activities is essential for the overall development of any economy. The main hurdle in achieving gender equity in labour market is people’s deep-rooted beliefs about women’s gender roles in society. The lack of employment opportunities could not explain the wide gender differences in employment in Kerala. Hence it was found necessary to probe into other possible factors that affect women’s decision to work rather than the labour market conditions. As a member of the women workforce of Kerala it is a privilege to bring into light the determinants of women employment within the context of the household through this endeavor, even though the road ahead was challenging due to complexity and multi-disciplinary nature of the topic. The quantification of various qualitative aspects related to the subject were difficult and time consuming, but finally succeeded in identifying the problems and prospects of women employees of the state. However the study was confined to the emerging service sector of Kerala in which majority of women are employed.

It has been believed globally that economic growth and education increases the participation of women in economic activities outside the household. Even though the economic growth and education of women are higher in Kerala than the all India level, work participation of women is the lowest in the state. This is contradictory for a state with a high human development and a high gender empowerment among other Indian states. Educational achievements fail to give any satisfactory explanation for the low employment rate for women. Women’s edge over men in educational achievements is not translated into gainful employment. The lower work participation and the existence of a gendered work structure have limited women’s access to independent sources of income.

Despite near total literacy, little effort has been made to direct literacy towards building up a gender sensitive social environment challenging the survival of feudal-patriarchal attitudes perpetuating gender discrimination and violence against women in the state. A number of women job seekers are forced to take up employment in vocations which need very low skills in the service sector. The gender inequalities persisting in the labour markets in the state could be reduced only by an active intervention of the government. The government of Kerala has a scheme named
flagship programme on finishing school for women launched in 2008. This scheme proposes to support women to complete graduation and equip women job seekers to upgrade their skills through training so as to make them employable using the services of a number of institutions like industrial training institutes, engineering colleges, public and private industries etc. Also it is happy to know that a gender park, aimed at bringing women's views in developmental matters, is to be established in near future in Kozhikode by the state government. This novel project is expected to be a model for the whole of the country and may influence gender considerations in five-year plans and annual plans in future.

However, the effectiveness of such policy measures or projects can be ascertained only with the help of micro-level studies on the various sub-groups of women employees in the state. This earnest attempt to explore the determinants of women employment in Kerala and various dimensions of it within the context of household hopefully help the government to implement and modify polices to accomplish the goal of equitable development.