CHAPTER III
METODOLOGY

Area of Study

The State of Kerala, located in South India, is bounded in the north by Karnataka, on the east and southeast by Tamil Nadu, on southwest by the Indian Ocean and on the west by the Arabian Sea. The State came into being in the year 1956 as a result of the States Reorganization Act. It is the second smallest state in India with a land area of 38,863 sq. kin and a population of 31,838,619 (2001). The density of population is very high (819/sq km) next to Bihar and West Bengal (2001 Census).

Considering the peculiarity of different regions of the state the entire land area of Kerala can be divided mainly into three geographical zones, viz., north zone, central zone and south zone. Nearly 50 percent of the population of Kerala is dependent upon agriculture for their livelihood. Rice and tapioca are the major food crops. Forests account about 24 percent of the land area of the state.

The state has been widely acclaimed as a development model which is unique with its high profile social development as is evidenced in the field of literacy, life expectancy, fertility, basic education, sex ratio favoring women, wide distributive measures such as land reform, minimum wages
legislation, public distribution and social security schemes. But all these achievements made against the low growth in the state shows its development as paradoxical.


In the three-tier local bodies in Kerala to which elections were conducted in the year 2000, at the Gram Panchayat level, nearly 36 percent were women—three percent more than the statutory 1/3 reservation. Of the total number of women Panchayat members, 78 percent were in Gram Panchayats, 10 percent in Block Panchayats, 11 percent in Municipal Corporations and the rest in District Panchayats.

Profile of the Sample Districts

1. Thiruvananthapuram

Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala, is the southernmost district in the state. From the time of Raja Marthanda Varma (shifting the capital from Thakkalai to Thiruvananthapuram) it is the citadel of political power. Thiruvananthapuram District has 4 taluks, namely, Thiruvananthapuram, Nedumangad, Neyyattinkara and Chirayinkezhu. It has a total area of 2192 sqkms and a population of 3234707, with women
constituting the majority (51.42 percent) at 1,663,283. The majority are Hindus; Christians and Muslims form the minorities. The district has a high density of population (1,476/sqkm). The sex ratio in the district is 1,058 women for every 1,000 men. The district has a literacy rate of 86.26 percent—far above the national average of 56 percent (2001 Census).

Thiruvananthapuram is not an industrial area. People are mainly engaged in agriculture. Rubber, tea, pepper, coconut, cloves, ginger and arecanut are the agricultural products. Nevertheless, industries like Travancore Titanium, Thiruvananthapuram Rubber Works, Kerala State Textile Corporation, Hindustan Latex and English India Clay are some of the industries located in the district. The district has 78 km. of coastal line. In the western part are the Sahya Mountains and Agasthya Peak, which is 6,132 feet above the mean sea level. The major rivers flowing through the district are the Neyyar, the Karamanayar and the Vatnanapuram. Thiruvananthapuram City is well known for the famous Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple, the Art Gallery of Raja Ravi Vanna and an Astronomical Observatory.

Besides the four taluks and four municipal corporations there are 12 Block Panchayats and 85 Gram Panchayats in the district. There are a total of 420 elected representatives at the Gram Panchayat level. For the present study, Perumkadavila and Vellanadu Blocks are selected at random for data collection.
2. Idukki

Idukki is the biggest district of the State of Kerala, having an area of 4476 sqkms. It is located in the high ranges in the central zone and has lesser population compared to other districts of the state. The density of population is 252/sqkm. According to the 2001 Census the female literacy rate in the district is 85.04 and it has a sex ratio of 999 females per 1000 males, which is comparatively low in the state and is well below the state average of 1058 females per 1000 males. The district has a low rate of growth of population (11.07 percent). People belonging to Hindu, Christian and Islamic religions live there. The people of Idukki District depend on agriculture. Tea estates and pepper growing farms bring the major revenue for the district. Cardamom, vanilla, coffee, arecanut, coconut and tapioca are the other crops grown here.

Idukki has four taluks. At the grassroot level there are eight Block Panchayats and 57 Gram Panchayats. There are a total of 220 elected representatives in the Gram Panchayats. For the present study two blocks, namely, Nedumkandam and Knittappana are selected at random.

3. Malappuram

Malappuram is one among the northern districts of Kerala. It has a land area of 3350 sqkm. Of the 14 districts in the state, Malappuram has the highest population and the lowest socio-economic development. It has a
population of 36,29,640 (2001 Census) and a density of population of 1022/sqkm. Of the total population in the district, 17,59,479 are males and 18,70,161 females. The district has a comparatively high rate of growth of population. Female literacy is 85.96 percent and the sex ratio is 1053 females/1000 males.

Malappuram is a Muslim dominated district and is backward in many respects. Poor socio-economic background and the tradition bound religious practices of the people push many poor families to get their girls married to people of Mysore and Gulf Arabs (Mysore Kalyanam and Arabic Kalyanam), which often lasts only for 2-3 months and ends in the grooms deserting the young and helpless mothers in a pathetic predicament. Such disastrous marriages have rendered the plight of young girls very precarious. Early marriage (often minor girls) coupled with poor socio-economic background lead to the deteriorating health and social status of women in this area.

The main occupation of the people here is agriculture. There are no major industries in the district. The total literacy of the district is 91.46 percent and the female literacy is 85.96 percent. Malappuram has six Taluks and five Municipalities. It has 12 Assembly constituencies, 14 Block Panchayats and 100 Gram Panchayats. The number of women Panchayat members at the Gram Panchayat level is 444. For the study two blocks, namely, Nilamboor and Vandoor, are randomly selected.
Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on the theories of sex role differentiation. The division of labor between men and women in different societies is based exclusively on gender roles rather than sex roles, determined by culture (nurture) rather than biology (nature). There is no evidence to prove that men are brighter, wiser, and better suited to highly paid jobs than women. The differences have more to do with inequality. There are no societies in which men do not, in some aspects of social life, have more wealth, status and influence than women. Women in different societies have shown in different periods homogenous traits of a non-entity. This amounts to a gender hierarchy, a system of power, in which maleness is privileged over femaleness. Therefore, in sharing power as well as economic benefits, gender disparity is prevalent everywhere. There are several theories of sex role differentiation. The functionalist, the conflict and the neo-Marxist theories are important among them.

Functionalist theorists see gender differentiated roles as functional to society. Contrary to this, the conflict theorist Randall Collin believes that sexual inequality is based on the conflict between a dominant group (men) and a subordinate group (women) on the basis of sexual access.
Later neo-Marxist writers also agree with Collins but state that the basic relation between the sexes and their inequality are rooted in the structure of capitalism rather than in a guarantee of sexual access. A complicated set of relations among capitalism, patriarchy and the structure of the economy for sex role differentiation are cited by Hartman (1976).

The neo-Psychoanalytical theory propounded by Chodorow (1974) suggests that gender difference may come from childhood identification patterns and socialization,

All these theories explain with some plausibility the sex role difference in society. The status of men and women in a society is changing all the time and seems likely to go on changing. Despite vast improvements in the status of women, it is seen that there are many sources of resistance to further progress. This resistance rests both in active discrimination against women by men who are trying to safeguard their position, privileges, power and wealth and in the fact that inequality between the sexes is rooted in most of our social structures.

The present study, which gives special emphasis to problems faced by women in participating in socio, economic and political activities, also focuses on gender inequality in sharing power, benefits and other privileges by women. The change that was brought about in the life of women and in the family itself after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which envisions one third reservation of seats for women at the grassroot level governing
institutions, has very visibly disturbed the existing gender role
differentiation in society. Change of role from a housewife to that of a
people's representative disturbs the whole system as the woman have
started increasingly to spend her time outside the home, playing a different
role, leading to greater adjustments between genders. These changes,
along with gender inequality in sharing power, generate resistance from the
system-family and also society—against women’s participation. The
problems identified in the study can be perceived against this background.

Sample Frame and Size
Selection of Districts

Multistage random sampling method was used to select the sample
Panchayats for the study. In the first stage three districts of the Kerala State
were selected from the three geographical zones in the State. Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of the state, being the centre of political
power, was selected to represent the southern zone; the district of Idukki, a
socio-economically developed region, was selected to represent the central
zone and Malappuram, a socio-economically low profile district, to
represent the northern zone.

Selection of Blocks

In the second stage, two blocks in each of these three districts were
selected randomly. Simple random sampling method was adopted. As such
six blocks, representing three districts of the state, were selected.
Selection of Gram Panchayat

In the third stage, five Gram Panchayats were selected at random from each of the six selected blocks. A total of 30 Panchayats were thus selected from six blocks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zones</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Blocks</th>
<th>Panchayats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>klukki</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of Sample Respondents

There are two categories of respondents sampled from the same area under study. The first category constitutes the women Panchayat members of various Panchayats of the three districts. The common women of the Panchayats who are members of Neighbourhood Groups constitute the second category of respondents.

Selection of Women Panchayat Members

The total women representatives in the Gram Panchayats of the three districts together constitute the universe of the first category of respondents. There are 1084 women representatives in the Gram Panchayats under study. From the universe a 10 percent sample was selected for the study adopting proportionate stratified sampling procedure. That is, 42 out of the 420 representatives from Trivananthapuram, District, 22 out of the 220 from klukki District and 44 out of the 440 from Malappuram District: were selected. Thus a total of 108 elected representative respondents were selected for data collection.
As for the second category of respondents, all the women in the three districts constitute the universe for the study. From such a wide universe culling a suitable sample is rather difficult. Therefore women who were members of various Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) functioning all over the state were taken for representing the common women in rural areas. Since there are thousands of such groups in each district a certain number of groups/women have to be selected to represent the vast universe. As such 100 women are randomly selected from each of the three districts. A sample size of 300 respondents is selected for collecting data.

Tools for Data Collection

Interview schedules were prepared separately for the two categories of respondents. Apart from the interview schedules a problem checklist was prepared for the respondents, enlisting the problems that women may encounter in their day to day activities, to find out the major hurdles to participation. Suitable case studies illustrating the problems encountered by the elected representatives and the members of the Neighborhood Groups.
functioning under the Gram Panchayats in real life conditions were prepared for the study.

Schedule for Women Panchayat members

The schedule for the first category of respondents consists of items relating to their socio-economic background, political orientation, party affiliation, previous experience in socio-economic and political activities and questions that probe the extent of their participation and difficulties in the Gram Panchayat.

Schedule for Common women

The second schedule prepared for common women consists of items relating to the socio-economic background of these women and other information regarding their participation in the developmental activities of the Panchayat like participation in resource identification and assessment, awareness of various Panchayat activities, attending the Grain Sabha, Neighborhood Groups, daily household work etc.

Problem Checklist

A checklist is a tool that contains items that the respondents understand and which briefly and succinctly expresses their views better than answers to open ended questions. The present checklist contains items of problems that a woman may encounter in her domestic life as well as outside the home, especially when she participates in socio-economic and
political activities. It also consists of statements that the respondents were asked to number according to the intensity of the problems that affected their participation. Rank correlation was applied to find out the correlation between the two groups of respondents in numbering the cited problems on the checklist. The checklist prepared was common for both the groups and was administered individually to elicit correct responses. Discussions with groups of respondents were held to collect data.

Pre-testing

A pre-testing was conducted to verify the effectiveness of the tools prepared for data collection. Both the draft schedule and the draft checklist were tried out on 10 elected representatives in a block and 25 common women of Neighborhood Groups in the same block. The study was carried out in Thiruvananthapuram District in March 2003. The main objective of the pre-testing was to test the clarity, applicability and feasibility of questions included in the tools for data collection. The survey approach was followed in the pilot study.

Some vague questions which the respondents were unable to comprehend, were deleted from the draft schedule and checklist. Only perfected questions and statements which were found to be reliable, meaningful and practically applicable were kept in the tool and used for the final study. The sample taken for pre-testing was not included in the final study.
Data Collection Procedure

The survey approach was used for data collection. After building rapport with the respondents, the researcher personally interviewed them. In the case of both the categories of respondents questions were asked about the hurdles they faced in participating in various activities of the Panchayat. For the study, data were generated to establish the relationship between the major independent and dependent variables. The same approach was followed for the other category of respondents.

Personal interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted to understand the problems encountered by women in general and individuals in particular.

The checklist for identifying problems was administered separately to all the respondents. They were asked to mark Yes or No (V or X) to those problems which they encountered in their day to day activities. Discussions were held with both the categories of women on the major items on the checklist.

Discussions were also conducted with other members in the Panchayat, including Presidents (in the case of male ones), Secretaries and other male elected representatives of the Panchayat in order to get a full view of the data furnished by the respondents.
The women Panchayat members were met mostly in Panchayat offices and, in some cases, in their respective residences. Common women, on the other hand, were interviewed in their respective houses in the afternoons when most of them were free from their daily chores. The responses were recorded during the interviews. Prior appointments were made in some cases where the representatives who were Presidents of Panchayats were found to be busy. It took about 45 minutes to conduct an interview. The overall data collection lasted for five months.

Case Studies

Suitable case studies were prepared to bring home the difficulties and the problems faced by women in detail. These include the profiles of a woman Panchayat member, a Panchayat President and an NHG group representing common women.

Data Analysis

The data were scrutinized and edited before coding. A computer was used for the analysis of the data with an SPSS package. Univariate, bivariate and multi-variate tables have been prepared to identify the relationship among the variables to explore the extent of participation and the various hindrances participation. Tools like z-test, rank correlation and logistic regression analysis were used for quantification of the data.
Limitations of the Study

1. Only elected representatives belonging to Gram Panchayats in rural areas were included. Representatives from urban local bodies could not be included.

2. In the common women’s category, women belonging to Neighborhood Groups (NHG), mostly below poverty line, were included. Women in different walks of life, such as teachers, working women, students etc., were not included in the study and hence their problems could not be included in the study.
References
