CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Literature on women studies is available everywhere, depicting women in different walks of life. Going through such literature, one can find that the thrust is always on the inferior status of women, discrimination, exploitation etc. in time and space around the world. Gender equality, equality of opportunities, equal participation in power and safeguards against exploitation are only some of the demands in favor of women against the backdrop of her struggle to live as an individual. The problem encountered by women in all walks of life is getting space in development literature.

Overview of Related Literature

Participation has become one of the most widely used terms in development literature. Some of the forms of participation ranging from coercion to total local control are described below.

1. Manipulative: Participation is mere pretence. People’s representatives are on Boards or Committees, but lack power.

2. Passive: People participate by being told what has already been decided. Announcements on projects are made unilaterally by the government agencies without listening to the people’s response. The information collected belongs to external professionals; it is not shared with the people.
Consultative: People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External professionals define the problems, the information gathering process and then the analysis. The professionals are under no obligation to accept the people’s views.

Materialistic: People participate by contributing resources (e.g., labour) in return for material gains from a project. The people have no stake in the participation process or in the project after it ends.

Functional: Participation is seen as a means necessary to achieve a project’s goals. People may participate by organizing themselves into groups to help meet the predetermined objectives of the projects. The involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but the project authorities may have already made the major decisions.

Interactive: People participate in analysis, development of action plans, and information or strengthening of local institutions. The process of participation is as important as the end result. The participation is seen as a right not just the means for achieving a project goal. The use of participatory tools and inter disciplinary methodologies help increase awareness and learning among community groups. As groups take control over local decisions, they increase their stake in maintaining or changing existing structures or practices.
**Self-Mobilization:** People participate by taking the initiative to preserve a resource or change an existing social system independent of external institutions. The people may develop contracts with external agencies for financial assistance or technical advice but retain control over how the resources are allocated or used. Self-mobilization can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support even if they challenge existing distribution of power and wealth.

In all projects and programmes, implementing by various agencies including government, involves a certain kind of participation. Sometimes the presence of people groups formed for material benefits under various programmes is considered “active” participation. In some cases the principles of participation have been applied rather mechanically.

But such participation as is seen in the case of poverty eradication programmes cannot be considered “active” since the people under such programmes have no involvement in deciding about the implementation of the programmes and projects that involve them. What drives the participants to such programmes is only the tangible benefits and, as such, they participate only as beneficiaries and not as active participants in the development process. The apparent participation in such programmes is often described as “active” and the term *participation* is used in a narrow sense.
It is often objected that “participatory rhetoric,” like communism, is a noble dream but not very practical due to a naivete about human nature, that it has become a political slogan among some governments which control the process by “prominent displays of participatory intentions,” and that it is a good fund raising device for NGOs which, by showing their access to participating people and also being less bureaucratic, are able to obtain substantial funding from various donors.

Decentralised planning envisages people’s participation to a level of social mobilization. The Constitution of India spelt out the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats when it directs the state to make appropriate provisions in the law on Panchayats, devolving powers and functions to them in such a way as to enable them to function as “institutions of self government”. The “self governing” aspect is often misplaced as the local governments depend on the state government for funds to carry out programmes and behave as implementation channels rather than as self-governing institutions. However, such limitations do not in any way prevent the Panchayats from involving people in various activities.

Indian Scenario

In India, although the problems of unequal participation of women had long been well recognised and appreciated, it took decades after independence to design policies and programmes that can transform
women into active partners in developmental activities from their dependent beneficiary” status. The process, no doubt inadequate, led to women’s being involved in the decision-making process and occupying leadership positions in different spheres like the Legislature and the Panchayati Raj institutions.

**Economic Growth and Women’s Participation**

Economic development and growth is a priority to improve the standard of living of weaker sections of the society, especially women. However, while economic growth has created opportunities for a substantial proportion of the population, very often it has also created new inequalities or perpetuated the existing ones. Not only the rate of economic growth, but also its pattern are important to determine whether the benefits of growth reach all sectors of the population. There is also a corresponding need for equitable distribution, social cohesion, local participation and targeted intervention for socially marginalised groups to benefit from development. Often the participation aspect is neglected, especially in the case of women. Women’s access to resources and participation are complicated by the social requirement that they must satisfy many norms and requirements established in the society.

The Government of India, through successive plans, initiated various poverty alleviation programmes over the years. A change in approach is visible in the IX Plan, in which the initiative was taken for
community empowerment through promoting community organizations like Neighborhood Groups (NHGs), Neighborhood Communities (NHCs), Community Development Societies (CDS) etc. Promotion of Self Help Groups (SHGs) for poverty alleviation is being carried out through these community organizations in a decentralized manner. The Panchayati Raj Act of 1992, which had been enacted earlier in the VIII Plan, provided an institutional link between people and the government. It envisaged a three-tier Panchayat Raj system at the village, the block and the district levels. Reservation of one-third of the grassroots level elected posts for women was also guaranteed.

The post Liberalization approach to poverty alleviation through micro credit is novel and hailed as participatory. But, in the third world, for many married women, access to credit is intricately intertwined with gender relationship. That their husbands must know about and give their consent for them to secure a loan even from informal sources is a point to be reckoned with. This points to the overlapping constraints from different dimensions that must be considered when women’s cause is involved in economic development strategies. Moreover, economic betterment at the cost of civic functioning will widen the gap between people and the government.
Empowerment through poverty alleviation and community participation heralded a new era in women’s development. Thousands of groups were formed all over India in the nooks and corners of her villages. Moreover, women’s role as participants, leaders and decision-makers at the grassroots level has invited widespread debate and discussion more than ever before. However, the prospect of amending the Constitution to reserve seats for women in state legislative bodies and Parliament is a contentious issue even now. The failure of the Women’s Reservation Bill more than twice in Parliament despite the vaunted commitment of all major political parties indicates the undercurrent against women’s participation at higher levels of power.

Women in Work Force in India

Women in India generally dominate the informal sector of the economy while in the formal economic sector they are mostly disproportionately represented in low wage positions. Besides, women’s contribution to the GDP is generally not acknowledged quantitatively or qualitatively. Economic statistics and analysis of labour and capital grossly neglect women’s work as producers. Although women constitute a major portion of the wage labour force, their work participation rates are related to a number of trends which adversely affect women: decline in the female proportion of the population, declining representation in decision-making bodies, increasing gap in male-female literacy rates, and unequal access to health and medical services.
In 1991 only 22 percent of women were in the workforce as compared to 52 percent of men. However, many were engaged in the unorganized sector and, therefore, did not count among the visible workforce. As such, regular income and sustainable livelihood are lacking for the majority of women. According to the 2001 Census, the work participation rate for women increased up to 31.32 percent as against 58.96 percent for men’s work participation.

A major finding of the Time Use Surveys across the globe is that women carry a disproportionately greater burden of work than men and that, since women are responsible for a greater share of the non-System of National Account (SNA) work in the care economy (i.e. home based work which is difficult to measure), they enter the labour market already overburdened with work. This dual work burden is neither recognised in the data nor considered adequately in socio-economic policy making. Nevertheless, according to the Economic Survey 2000-2001, the Government of India observes that in the National Income Accounting, “a significant part of the contribution of a larger section of society, especially women, towards the economy remains unrecognised in quantitative terms or at best under valued because of the restricted definition of economic activity in National Income Accounting. Only market oriented activities are considered ‘economic’”. Therefore the recognition of services rendered by womenfolk in the development process assumes much significance.
Women’s Participation as Decision-Makers

Besides being part of a grossly under represented workforce, women are also seriously under represented in other spheres such as decision-making in political as well as nonpolitical spheres. In a country like India, this seems paradoxical: on the one hand, women have moved into the professions and the civil services in far higher numbers than in other South Asian countries, while on the other, their entry into the upper echelons seems to be restricted by a ceiling. Table 2.1 shows women’s participation in some of the higher echelons of power in India.

Table 2.1
Women in Decision-making in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Sphere of activity</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women as % of men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Executive bodies of political parties</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cabinet Ministers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High Court Judges</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Civil Services</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Executive Bodies of trade unions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Asia HDR, 2000

Women’s participation in political life is fairly limited, despite their turnout for casting votes in elections. In India, for example, the turnout difference between men and women in the 1991 general elections was eight percent. But their actual representation in Parliament was only nine percent. The number of seats won by women to the Lok Sabha in 1999 was 49 in a House of 543 members and, in the case of the Rajya Sabha, 19 seats out of 245. The average percentage of women in the Lok Sabha has been between
six and 10.3 over the past fifty-five years of democratic governance in India. In state assemblies, while the presence of women MLAs is nil in some states and Union Territories (Mizoram, Nagaland, Pondicherry) it has not exceeded 13 per cent in the other states. Therefore, casting votes in elections is entirely different from contesting and getting elected. For instance, out of a total of 4000 candidates who contested in the 1999 general elections, only 280 (6.5 per cent) were women.

Women’s low participation in politics does not seem to have any direct correlation to literacy, if one were to go by the figures for Rajasthan and Kerala, which have the lowest and the highest literacy rates respectively. Women’s overall social position also does not seem to be a determinant—Kerala and Manipur, with strong social traditions of women’s equality, have less than 10 percent women in their legislatures. In spite of the fact that most of the national political parties have stated in their manifestoes that they support reservation for women in Parliament, very few women candidates are actually nominated. While the party arithmetic in Parliament may in itself be sufficient to translate the women’s reservation bill into law, it has failed consistently on the floor, reminding one that there are no quick fixes when it comes to contending with patriarchy and inbuilt prejudices in the socio-political structure.
There are many reasons why women may not participate, from traditional to purposive discrimination. Recognising this limitation, wherein gender is concerned, the Indian Government has passed laws that it is mandatory for local governments to include women.

Experience in Decentralised Planning

Kerala has had very little experience in decentralized planning though numerous attempts at setting up a decentralized planning structure have been made during the past four decades. District Development Councils (DDCs) in the 1960s, District Planning Offices in the 1970s, preparation of Special Component Plans and Tribal Sub Plan at the district level in the 1980s and successful decentralization of the first year annual plan (1990-91) of the X Five Year Plan were some of the attempts in this regard. However, the district planning strategy was a failure due to poor integration and lack of coordination with the lower levels.

The Draft Approach Paper for the Eighth Plan (1990-95) laid great emphasis on people's participation in the preparation of plans. According to the State Planning Board (1989), “Only their creative insights can ensure unerring guidance, their vigilance and energy in action, implementation. In short only the whole-hearted participation of the people in the planning process can ensure its success”. Decentralization of the planning process, it was recognized, was a precondition for participatory planning. This approach signaled a major break with the past.
The Kerala Panchayati Raj Act was passed on the 23rd of April, 1994.

Prior to the legislation, Kerala had only Village Panchayats, Municipal Councils, and Municipal Corporations and, for a short period, there existed District Councils. The District Panchayats and Block Panchayats were two institutions newly created. One of the novel features introduced by the Act was the Constitutional guarantee provided for the entry of women into the locally elected bodies. This was indeed a welcome step when seen in the light of years of the socio-economic subjugation of women and their invisibility in the electoral process of the country in general and the women of this highly literate state in particular.

Some of the Powers of People under the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 are Listed Below.

* Every voter has a right to know the rationale behind each decision of the Panchayat.

* Voters can decide the scheme or development programme to be implemented in their ward.

* The scheme/programme has to be executed on the basis of a priority list prepared by the Gram Sabha and not elected representatives or officials.

* The list of eligible beneficiaries of government welfare schemes decided by the Gram Panchayat as per fixed criteria should eventually be scrutinized by citizens at the Gram Sabha. The final list of beneficiaries is to be prepared by the Gram Sabha through discussion.
* Every voter has the right to know what the Panchayat did about decisions taken earlier by the Gram Sabha. If the Panchayat failed to implement any of them, it has to present “detailed reasons” before the Gram Sabha.

* Voters can demand to know the detailed estimates of public works proposed in their ward.

* The performance audit report and other audit reports have to be placed before the Gram Sabha for discussion. Its recommendations and suggestions have to be conveyed to the Panchayat, which is bound to take action to correct the anomalies pointed out.

* Elected councilors have to convene the Gram Sabha at least every three months or face punishment.

* Voters have a right to know the budgetary provisions, details of plan outlay, allocation of funds, details of estimates and cost of materials of works executed or proposed to be executed in their ward.

People’s Campaign for Development Planning (PCDP)

After mobilizing thousands of people throughout the length and breadth of the state through a process starting right from the level of the Gram Sabha, the Government of Kerala embarked upon a campaign for development planning through its 9th Five Year Plan in the year 1995. The campaign was an attempt to conceptualize, operationalise and institutionalize a system of multilevel people centered planning process suitable to the regional specification of Kerala (Planning Board).
Participatory planning was intended to meet a number of goals. It was seen primarily as a means to overcome the stagnation in the productive sectors and the decline in the quality of services and assets in the social sectors built up assiduously through several years of state intervention. It was also envisaged as a strategy towards strengthening local bodies through the process of planning. The Sen Committee was set up to suggest amendments to the Panchayati Raj Act 1994 in pursuance of this approach. People’s planning also sought to create a new civic and development culture transcending partisan considerations. The overall approach adopted to planning was a growth oriented and rapid one, having regard to principles of equity. The decision to launch the campaign was influenced by a number of micro level experiments in participatory planning carried out in some Panchayats, mainly with the support of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP). Participatory planning was carried out in the campaign with the State Planning Board assuming the leadership. The campaign was launched with the announcement by the state government that 35-40 percent of development funds would be given to local bodies.

Gender Issues under the Plan

Gender dimensions aiming at better quality of life for women was also given due importance in the campaign. Special instructions were given to ensure greater participation of women in Gram Sabha meetings and women-related issues were an important theme for discussion both in Gram Sabha meetings and also in the training programmes conducted for the
resource persons. Moreover, in the cost benefit assessment of the projects, a gender impact statement was made mandatory. Finally, the local bodies were advised to set apart 10 percent of the grant-in-aid under Women Component Plan (WCP) for projects directly targeting women. However, “the WCP introduced as part of an effort for the economic empowerment of women in the community had the adverse effect of shrouding and debilitating the process of political empowerment of women in Panchayats and thereby diverting all their energies from the issue of important policy formulations. The central space in the stage of People’s Campaign was occupied by the WCP”7.

On the whole a gender and development approach was adopted in participatory planning, but the message that went down to the lower levels did not go beyond a women development approach. Hence the projects that were earned out under the Women Component Plan, for which 10 per cent of the plan funds were allocated, could not address the strategic gender needs of women.

Moreover, it is challenging to ensure people’s participation in the local planning and development process because the poorest of the poor, especially women and newly elected leaders, do not know how to exercise their powers for the development of their area and people8.
Socio-economic Development: Participation of Women in Neighbourhood Groups

The Panchayat, the unit of self-government at the grassroot level, facilitates the participation of women in planned development. This noble idea of democracy is being manifested through the Gram Sabha under each Ward in all Panchayats throughout India. Grassroots democracy envisions the majority attending the Gram Sabha and deliberate proceedings, suggest measures for development, find out new programmes for immediate implementation, frame guidelines for health and hygienic programmes and frame all programmes and projects for local development in the order of preference. The Gram Sabha thus acts as a miniature parliament where the members of the Panchayat present a plan of action and get the consent of the majority after considering the local needs and assessing the resources.

However, the inconvenience arising out of its unwieldy size and the resultant lack of community feeling among the participants call for a more compact body at the grassroots. In order to overcome these hurdles and to give more thrust to direct democracy the Government of Kerala formulated the concept of Neighborhood Groups in rural areas under the Panchayat. The Neighborhood Group, popularly known as Aayalkootam, is a small cluster comprising of 40-50 adult members, both men and women, in a neighborhood. The members, from among themselves, select the Secretaries and Presidents of the groups. It discusses all the development activities going on in a Panchayat in a detailed manner. The selection of
committees for carrying out public works like roads, bridges and other contract works is usually earned out by these groups. The decisions taken by the Ayalkoottam are presented in the Gram Sabha. The Ayalkoottam holds more or less the same powers as the Gram Sabha.¹

In the period between 1994 and 2000 more than 300 Panchayats constituted General Neighborhood Groups under their purview. Remarkable developments have been reported in Panchayats having successful Neighborhood Groups in their fold. Instances in which these Neighborhood groups assumed the functions of the “Nyaya Panchayat” by settling local disputes and invoking simple punishments in special cases are even reported.¹¹

However, the initiative to form General Ayalkoottams in all the Panchayats has gone down over the years. Change in government policy towards economic development programmes through Neighbourhood groups constituting SHGs pushed community participation in the general affairs of the Panchayat to the back stage,

Status of Women in Kerala

The status of women in a society or the attitude of a society towards its women is one of the measuring rods to assess the development of that society. The state possesses a very favorable sex ratio of 1058 females per 1000 males. Women in Kerala occupy high positions in all fields of public activity—educational, judicial, medical and engineering professions.
The Malayalee woman, in general, has an intense social sense, civic and national consciousness. She uses her freedom judicially and in the spirit of being an equal partner with man. Her roles as wife and mother are performed well. Education has sharpened her intellect, widened her outlook and fine-tuned her social and civic senses. Table 2.2 presents the elevated position of women in Kerala among the Indian states.

Table 2.2
Indicators of Women’s Status in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Average number of children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Infant mortality rate</td>
<td>80/100,000</td>
<td>13/100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Longevity</td>
<td>61 years</td>
<td>74 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Women literacy</td>
<td>39.29</td>
<td>87.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Average age at marriage</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sex ratio</td>
<td>825/1000</td>
<td>1058/1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Economics and Statistics, Kerala.

Education

Kerala stands out among all the states and regions of India for its remarkable achievements in raising the literacy level of its people. Female literacy in the state, according to the 2001 Census, is 87 percent as against the national average of 54.16. The school enrollment rate of girl students in the year 2001 for High School is 50 percent. The corresponding figures for Upper Primary and Lower Primary are 48 and 49 percent respectively. It is noted that Kerala has been well ahead of other states in India since the
beginning of this century in this respect. But now the picture is slowly fading into dim and gray despite remarkable quantitative changes in the field of education. The schools, colleges, training and technical institutions do not enhance the quality of education and they cannot contribute much to the field of higher education and research. Moreover, the appalling rise in the cost of education and the emergence of “high standard educational institutions” have made education inaccessible to poor students. This, coupled with the deteriorating quality of education in Government schools, has put the ordinary woman in a pathetic predicament.

Health

Kerala’s health indices are comparable to those of developed countries. In Kerala, both access to and utilization of health care, particularly among women, are quite high compared to the women in the rest of the country. A notable achievement in women's health in the state is that over 90 percent of child deliveries take place under institutional care whereas at the national level even 60 percent of the deliveries cannot be institutionalized. The result is that maternal mortality in the state has come down sharply. For every 3000 deliveries the reported maternal mortality is below one.

Female life expectancy in Kerala is 74 years, which is 15 years higher than the Indian average and six years above the corresponding figure for men in Kerala, which is 68. Girls and women have access to the health
care system in Kerala and primary data based surveys show that, in general, the rates of immunization of girls are as high as those of boys. Female literacy and education are crucial determinants of child survival, general health and hygiene. These in turn determine progress in other demographic and health indicators such as expectancy of life at birth, birth and death rates, infant mortality rate and general mortality.

At the same time the gains have brought with them some of the problems of advanced countries but without the economic background to solve them. A series of new kinds of diseases among the rich and the new awareness of health and hygiene necessitated opening of a number of super speciality hospitals in the state. Planners did not give thought to the allied problems and pressures that would emerge along with developmental activities. When dengue fever wrought a massive disaster, the concern was to alert the Public Health Department. Problems like unhealthy living conditions, filthy surroundings, scarcity of pure drinking water, absence of proper drainage and sewage, inadequacy of nursing facilities are conveniently kept aside as if waiting for the next seasonal havoc. Demanding more funds from the Center and meeting drought on a war footing are the recurrent scenario Keralites experience every year. Moreover, seasonal deaths due to rat fever, dengue fever etc. rock the state. These contradictions point to unscientific planning and development in the state.
Work Participation

Though Kerala ranks first in women's literacy rate and education, the work participation sex ratio shows a deviation. There are only 345 female workers per 1000 male workers, which is lower than the national average (1991). The work participation rate for women in 1991 was only 15.85 (which is less than the national average of 22) while that of men was 47.58, which is about three times that of women. This indicates that women's share of earned income in the state is only 12 percent. The above facts prove that a high 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 society.

Table 2.3
Relative Status of Women in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Reference Period</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>86.17</td>
<td>93.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>69.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work participation rate</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>47.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Employment in enterprises</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>25.19</td>
<td>74.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enrolment in schools</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>49.04</td>
<td>50.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Enrolment in colleges</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>14.72</td>
<td>85.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teachers in technical institutions</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>23.39</td>
<td>76.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Small scale industrial units</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>23.39</td>
<td>85.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Industrial training</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>26.60</td>
<td>73.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overview of women’s status in Kerala indicates that social development is remarkable in the state though the same degree of achievement is not recorded in the economic front as employees and entrepreneurs. However, the socio-economic status of women is better than that of women in the rest of the county in certain aspects.

Despite all these achievements and favorable factors, Kerala presents also a disturbing picture when it comes to atrocities against women.

Increasing Violence and Atrocities against Women

On the other side of the much-described social profile, Kerala shows many symptoms of a sick society. The rising number of suicides, dowry deaths and instances of violence and atrocities against women are a few examples in this regard.

Facts and figures across the state tell in unequivocal terms that women of this state do not enjoy physical security contrary to the implications of the fact that they belong to a state, which has social development indices parallel to those of a first world country. For instance, between 2001 and 2003, 256 women were murdered in the state. Registered cases of rape were 976. In these cases, victims below the age of 18 were 344. Of the 15 sex racket cases registered only five have progressed to the stage of serving the charge sheet (Mathrubhumi 18-06-2003).
Suicide

Kerala has received attention not only for its peculiar social development indicators but also for the rate of suicides in the state. It indicates a sick society wherein people lose hope when their ambitions get thwarted. Most of the suicide cases reported are due to financial burden. Indiscriminate consumerism is one of the reasons that put people under tremendous pressure eventually leading to suicide. According to official reports, Kerala stands first in suicide rate in India. Family suicides in the year 1998 were 38 and, in 2002, they rose to 105. Individual suicides in 1992 were 8103 and, in 2002, they rose to 9,810 (Malayala Manovama August 26, 2003).

Crime

In the case of physical security, the first and foremost criterion of women’s empowerment in any society, Kerala seems to grab the lame for the wrong reasons. The deteriorating social dynamics and behavioral pattern towards women when she moves out, travels in buses, works in offices or in different work sites are yet another disturbing factor in women’s status in this one hundred percent literate state. The burden of morality that she alone bears if anything untoward happens reveals that what is perceived is not even skin deep. More disgusting is the dirty negotiation in the marriage market and the pathetic condition of her life being linked directly to dowry.

Equally important is the failure of the judicial system in maintaining
balance when it comes to protecting women against social injustice. The scant regard of the executives for safeguarding women’s legitimate rights underlines the criticality of women’s position in this state.

In 2003, according to the National Crime Research Bureau, Kerala stood first in crime rate in India. The total number of cases registered in the year 2002 were 103,323 against 103,847 in 2001, showing a slight decline in the crime growth rate,

Table 2.4

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>552</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Molestation</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>1129</td>
<td>1512</td>
<td>1768</td>
<td>1643</td>
<td>1695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>149</td>
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<td>Dowry related Crimes (498)</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1689</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Others*</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>1433</td>
<td>2244</td>
<td>3265</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>2078</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>2548</td>
<td>3313</td>
<td>4970</td>
<td>7306</td>
<td>7473</td>
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*Others include murder, immoral trafficking, wife beating, child abuse and desertion Source: Kerala Crime Records Bureau

Consumerism

Indiscriminate consumerism is another factor that affects the values and perception in the life of women and young girls in Kerala. The remittance from emigrants enables many families to buy myriad products
available in the market. In order to achieve or maintain status, people buy goods and articles indiscriminately. This has led them into financial traps wherein women suffer much. The array of goods in the market pressurises many to achieve a considerable income by any means. The liquor consumption graph too shows an appalling picture, jeopardizing the health of men, disrupting family relationship and increasing domestic violence. The real threat to Kerala is not the weakness of its economic foundations but the growing culture of consumerism and waste fuelled by the developed countries and channeled through the process of globalization, which is nothing but an indirect annexation of the third world.

Political Participation

Though women in Kerala seem privileged, particularly in comparison with their counterparts in other states, women's participation in politics is low and not different from what prevails in the rest of the country. A handful of women in Kerala have reached the top by their grit and determination. These have been isolated cases without reflecting any easing of women's entry into the higher echelons of political leadership in parties or the government.

From 1957 to 1996 the participation of women in the Lok Sabha has never been crossed more than two out of the 19-20 seats contested. Likewise, the participation of women in the Assembly of Kerala from 1956 to 2001 is not different from that at the national. Except in 1996, the
number of women who got representation over the last decade has never been in double digits. In the Assembly elections of 2000, the number of women MLAs was merely eight in a House of 140. In 1957, their number was six in a House of 127. These statistics indicate that the situation has not improved significantly over the last fifty years in the state (Department of Economics and Statistics, Kerala).

Often it is cited that the lack of interest on the part of political parties to cede electoral space to women is the major reason why women lag behind. They often field dummy women candidates just for the sake of statistics in constituencies where male candidates are almost sure to win. In safe constituencies men are normally fielded rather than women. For instance, the seat distribution of both the political parties in the last Assembly elections clearly indicates the difference between promises and practices followed by the parties in power. In the 2000 elections, while the United Democratic Front (UDF) allotted nine out of 140 seats to women, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) allotted 15 out of 140 seats to women (Kerala State Election Commission).

The economic aspect of women empowerment is a much debated sphere in the development planning of the state as it is the cornerstone of political empowerment. But this too will not suffice for the cause unless a suitable social condition prevails. This can be clearly noticed in the case of Kerala, where a considerable number of women do work and earn for
themselves. But this capacity rather puts them in the precarious position of carrying a double burden and it in no way contributes to their freedom and fulfilling civic responsibility.

Above all, other factors such as a social condition devoid of prejudice and skepticism towards women’s participation in various activities, accepting women as individuals and an integral part of society’s development and the perception that women’s primary duty involves civic duty as well etc. are to be taken into consideration in the changed context of women’s participation at the grassroot level.

The reckless nature of power politics and the militant organization of political party structure and the purposive design of a male dominant society create an impression that politics is not a woman’s cup of tea. This is the general social condition that prevails in the country and the special position of Kerala is in no way an advantage for women.

The review of available literature on women’s participation in various aspects of life is organized in five main sections.

1. Participation in Workforce
2. Participation in Agriculture
3. Participation in Industry
4. Participation in Governance.
5. Other Related studies.
1. Participation in Workforce

The third world economy depends much on agriculture and is therefore marked for the considerable part played by the women workforce. But women’s work is devalued and a large number of women resort to subsistence agriculture\(^4\). A few case studies showed that in Nigeria women’s contribution is 100 percent in the case of weeding, storage and processing for almost all crops. In Asia women work 14 to 17 hours a day. Yet most of their work goes under valued in an economy that gives primacy to modernization and development. Reserving better opportunities of employment to man, discriminatory wages, lack of initiative and unduly long working hours for women are the major causes of differential income. Mitra and others\(^{15}\) (1980) remarked that the women labor force in India is a reserve pool of helpless labourers.

As reported by the National Committee on the Status of Women\(^{16}\) (1988), unorganized nature of employment, easy substitution of hired labour and traditional reservation of certain jobs for females are the main reasons for low rates of wages for women

Moreover, the participation of women as a workforce is biased when we analyze the statistical documentations of women workforce at various levels. Women are denied an acknowledgement of their work because their role in home-based production is rarely enumerated. According to Aiyar\(^{17}\) (1989), the biased statistics of workforce is best reflected in statistics dealing with female labour.
The National Commission of Self Employed Women (1987) pointed out that although women work for longer hours and contribute substantially to the family income, they are not perceived as part of the workforce by the data collecting agencies and governments.

Jayanti Ghosh (1999), in her paper, traces recent evidences on female participation in the workforce in India and also probes the causes that result in growing feminization in various Asian countries.

Participation of women as a workforce is constrained by both exploitation in the form of lesser wages and improper statistical documentation. It has been found that work of the women may not be reflected in data due to the biased outlook of the agencies collecting the data. Statistical bias results in the under-estimation of the role of women in development. It represents a distorted picture of the GNP and maintains a lower status for women in family and society.

The dual role of woman is the home arena is not reckoned as a contribution to the workforce. Her work in the family is not at all a work worth valuing and falls under her duty as a woman, wife and mother and is unnoticed and is invisible.

The invisibility of women’s work is part of a cultural system which views man as the primary breadwinner. According to Shanthi (1985), the invisibility of woman as an economic entity is at the root of her low status. The dual role of women as paid workers outside the family and as unpaid
workers in the family leads to a real contribution to the economy. A reliable technique should be evolved to quantify women’s contribution, especially non-monetary contribution to the economy at large.

Another study conducted by Lakshmi Devi (2000) in Trissur District of Kerala with the objective of identifying the factors that determine labour force participation of women along with their role in decision-making revealed that employed women have a greater role than unemployed women. A CD test was used to find out the association between employment and role in decision-making.

A woman undertakes a wide variety of jobs in their homes from dawn to dusk. Farm and home-based industries are part of her household. It is observed that due to financial compulsions she is further forced to find a remunerative job in an outside farm or firm.

2. Women’s Participation in Agriculture

Shobha (1986) conducted a study in Andhra Pradesh to find out the level of women participation in family affairs and farm activities as the major objective. Primary data were collected from four villages of two districts in the Telangana region by random sampling method. The analysis showed that, though female agricultural laborers are dominant in many activities, they are not recognised properly due to traditional social-economic conditions, male dominance in the family and lack of self-organization among women.
In order to analyze the impact of technology on employment and decision-making with the degree of involvement of women in farms and family work, Singh and Dutta\(^\text{24}\) (1988) conducted a study in Uttar Pradesh. One hundred and forty four families were selected at random. The study revealed that, on an average, three-fourths of the total work in agriculture was performed by the females of the family and that the major decisions were taken by the males alone. Since the real workers were different from the real decision-makers, the application of improved agriculture technology was hindered. Moreover, the impact of innovation was limited due to the low level of female participation.

In a case study of Palghat District of Kerala by Rekha and Saradamani\(^\text{25}\) (1983), it was found that legislations regarding property rights, marriage and inheritance were against due recognition of the participation of women in land activities.

Kaur\(^\text{26}\) (1987) examined the role of women in farm and family activities and their participation in rural development programmes among 380 respondents selected through stratified random sampling method. Women were playing vital roles inside and outside the family. The extent of participation in decision-making was not in line with their participation in production. The development programmes they were involved in were programmes related to family welfare and not to development schemes.
Molly Joseph (1999) attempts to estimate the existing rate of participation of women beneficiaries in the development programmes of different organizations in Kerala. The major thrust of the analysis was on the impact of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations on the rate of participation. Data was collected through a mailed questionnaire. Simple statistical tools like Likert's scale and attitude scales were used to analyze the determinants of women’s participation. The study revealed, among other things, that the actual degree of women’s participation is found to be unsatisfactory more in Governmental Organizations than in NGOs.

Manuja Devi (1992), with the objective of examining the impact of income generating programmes on the living conditions of rural women, conducted a study in Warangal District of Andhra Pradesh. Out of 50 mandals, eight were selected and the survey method was used for data collection. The study revealed that the socio-economic background of women plays a crucial role in determining the success of trade and in attaining financial independence and status. Moreover, illiteracy is the greatest hindrance among women to attain success in their work.

A study was conducted by Sreekumar and others (2000) on 180 farm women with the objective of motivating and mobilizing women farmers through a group approach in 30 villages under 6 blocks in the Palghat District of Kerala. The study was conducted with an ex-post facto design with matching pairs involving members and non-members of
SHGs in the area. The study revealed that factors like lack of collective programmes in the group, presence of economically non-viable programmes, non-availability of credit and marketing facilities and absence of self help thrift programmes had adversely affected the functioning of the groups.

3. Women’s Participation in Industry

Industrialization has heavily discriminated against women. This is revealed in a study carried out by Misra (1986) in a textile factory in Bombay. The policy of not recruiting women as employees caused their heavy decline. The main issue was not that of equal pay but of equal opportunities.

Despite similar levels of education, there is clear inequality in employment opportunities and earnings among men and women, says Mehta (1989), after examining the extent of differences in employment and earning opportunities among men and women with similar education.

A study by Malavika (1982) of 80 sweeper women of Delhi proved that, with urbanization, poor women were subjected to many pressures. Participant observation was employed in the study and it revealed that employment has not helped to increase their decision-making role in the family.
An exploratory research was conducted by Rama Joshi (1988) to evaluate the impact of women’s employment on work process, organizational policies and practices. A sample size of 99 employees from an electronics firm was taken. The apparent difference in work values of men and women was found by a ‘t’ test. It was observed that, though women had longer years of work experience, they were earning less than their male counterparts they were doing non-technical work. Women seemed to place higher value on security and safety.

4. Participation of Women in Governance

To understand the status of women in society, an examination of their political status is necessary. It has now been accepted that women’s right to vote and to occupy positions is fundamental to their status. At the same time it is said that women are reluctant or rather uninterested to come forward to take up positions and participate. Far distant is the reality in which, when it comes to political participation, a double standard is visible in the attitude of men in power in the matter of power sharing. As such women are often sidelined owing to various stereotyped roles attributed to them. This phenomenon is universal and the problems of women are universal in nature as well.

In Czechoslovakia women are reported to be not interested in the extremist political attitude where there is a right wing and a left wing and nothing in between them.
Swedish women prefer to keep away from politics due to diffidence and impediments to their effective functioning. In Australia also women are of the view that they can function well only with the external support of relatives, friends and of mentors.

It is indeed strange that women in less developed countries in Asia have come up to exercise and enjoy power at the helm of as Presidents and Prime Ministers. The women who have attained higher power berths have come from staunch political families: Corason Aquino, Sirimao Bandaranaike, Banazir Bhuto, Indira Gandhi and Khalida Zia. Here it must be noted that some of them got power after the death of a political parent or spouse.

A study of women in public life conducted by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) also argues that only a critical mass of women allows female politicians to bring different values to public life: “The fewer the number of women in the public life... the less they are likely to be able to confidently and distinctively assert female values, priorities and characteristics. Women in public figure as a minority and, for functioning on a basis of equality with men, have had to adapt and adopt the male priorities in public life”.

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Women in Local Governance in India

A study conducted by Manikyamba (1989) entitled “Women in Panchayat Raj Structures” is an examination of the working of Panchayati Raj in general and the role of women beneficiaries and the benefactors in the socio-economic and political process of development by assessing the role of women presiding officers of the Panchayati Raj in particular. The study was conducted for a long period, i.e., from 1956 to 1989, before the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The sample includes one Zilla Parishad (30 members), two Panchayat Samitis (5 members), five Mandalas (34 members) and five Grama Panchayats (19 members) in the state of Andhra Pradesh. A sample of 88 women was covered and their socio-economic background was looked into. Among other things, the study revealed that education and participation are interrelated. Economic status gives a sense of confidence and encouragement to women to participate in various activities in the community. At the same time it also revealed that caste plays an important role in the selection of members to the Panchayat bodies. She was of the view that, given the opportunity, talented and interested women could play very effective roles in politics.

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution has given this opportunity to Indian women for participating in political affairs at the grassroots. Hitherto a marginalised group, when given the opportunity, women showed mixed reaction towards participation. While many are blamed for their proxy roles, individuality and personal capacity help several women to
make a mark in the outside home environment. Since the enactment of the Constitutional Amendment several studies have documented their participation, throwing light on various aspects of women's participation.

Mukta Banerjee\(^{39}\) (198\_) through his four case studies on the performance of elected women representatives of Panchayats drawn from a field project meant to strengthen the participation of women in local self-governance, depicts micro realities against the macro myths. The experience of an upper class woman representative, an illiterate woman representative and an efficient woman Sarpanch in Karnataka’s only all-women Panchayat were taken. It unfolds many realities against the myths such as women in the upper caste are more privileged than the lower caste women and illiteracy and lack of education constrain women from effective participation etc. According to him, with the passage of time, women’s dependence will decline and women can take up higher responsibilities with ease and even illiterate women can work effectively. At the same time education or higher caste status may not help women to come up. The study thereby shatters many myths regarding women’s participation in power.

Whatever the level of participation, gender division in work is the rule of the day. Arobindo Ghosh\(^{40}\) (1995) throws light on this inside-outside dichotomy in Panchayat Raj institutions in West Bengal. In this study he analyzes the traditional concept of women’s role in the “inside” sphere such as reproduction and family affairs and men’s interaction with the public
“outside” sphere. In the aftermath of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment a reflection on this inside-outside dichotomy in sharing of work in Panchayat affairs is taken up. The study reveals that women leaders are assigned works relating to health, educational relief, social welfare etc. They are denied development oriented works such as land, forest, irrigation, co-operation, agriculture etc. He is of the opinion that the prevalence of such inside-outside dichotomy even in sharing the responsibilities in the Panchayat should be checked. If we really want the well being of society women should be considered contributors to development rather than beneficiaries of welfare services.

Ashu Paricha ⁴¹ (2000) conducted a study in order to verify some of the structural and cultural odds restraining women’s participation in public affairs and negative arguments for empowering women in the village of Mahadevapura, in Panchakula District of Haryana State. The village is divided into five wards and each ward elects a panch. The study revealed that, by electing a female Sarpanch no change is noticeable in the plight of the women in the village. She is a proxy candidate and her husband, an ex-panch, rules the village, giving no place to the new Panchayati Raj Act and reservation. In Ashu’s words, education is one of the silent revolutions that will be successful, as legislation overnight can’t do wonders.
Arguments against Women’s Participation were;

- Women who become members of Panchayat and local bodies will disturb the harmony of homes and family life. Even though men tolerate women working in offices for fixed hours they do not take kindly to it when their role changes to one of community leadership. This is because then the women have to attend to people’s problems as leaders. Then who will take care of the children and the household chores, the men folk ask.

- Women will become the target of attacks by anti-social elements when they move out of their homes or go outside their village for work, meetings and so on.

- Whenever women hold elected offices, male officers are the ones who dictate what is to be done. They take control of the entire situation and women elected representatives become the helpless victims of officialdom.

- Finally, these opponents contend, even if women are elected in large numbers, the power equation will never change. “Instead of Ram Singh his wife will be there”.

Another study conducted by Gowda S. Govinda and others (1996) in Karnataka State reveals that the statutory reservation of seats in the Panchayat Raj institutions provides an opportunity to rural women to formally involve themselves in the development process at the grassroot level to secure as many development benefits as possible to the local
community. The study covered 250 women who were selected purposively at the rate of 130 and 120 respectively from the developed and backward Taluks of Bangalore Rural District. They could put forth a fairly better development role performance and could secure benefits to the people of their village, mainly in the field of agriculture, public works, civic amenities, welfare and education, says the author. They also involved themselves in organizing health programmes for the benefit of the people in their villages or Mandal area.

Likewise, Snehalatha Panda (1997), on the basis of her study conducted in Orissa, explored the rural socio-political situation and performance of women representatives in Panchayati Raj. The study was undertaken in three phases; immediately after the election, after 6 months and, finally, after two years and a sample survey was conducted in each phase. It focuses on the socio-economic background of the participants and on breaking the barrier of traditional patriarchal society to enter into the political arena, which gives true meaning to grassroots democracy. The mandatory provision of 33 percent reservation and persuasion led most of the women to politics. The important aspect is that the women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness and an increasing perception of their role and responsibilities in the third phase and there was a positive change on the part of men and society to accept the women in their new role.
Another study conducted by Dilip Ghosh (1997) on the impact of the one-third reservation for women in representation in Bourbon District also says that women of rural areas, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, participate in grassroots level politics.

Quite contrary to this, Jayalekshmi (1997), through her study conducted in Karnataka, highlights the key issues and other operational problems faced by the first generation political aspirants after the 73rd Amendment. The main objective of the study was to analyze women’s role as decision-makers and identify operational difficulties. It contends that reservation has merely brought in a quantitative change in gender participation rather than ushering in a qualitative developmental effort. She is of the opinion that training can help to reduce the difficulties of the members and that a location-specific strategy with the help of NGOs can change the situation.

Kailash Chander and others (2000) conducted a study in Angrola Development Block in Haryana State with a sample of 100 representatives from a total of 286 in the block in eight randomly selected villages. An interview schedule was used for the study. Information regarding the knowledge of the respondents was collected with the help of a knowledge scale constructed for the purpose. The study revealed that representatives in general and women in particular possess a low level of knowledge.
Agarvall and others (2000) conducted a study in Hissar District of Haryana State. All the women Panchayat members from 12 selected villages were purposively selected for the study. Participation and extent of participation of the panches and sarpanches were studied on a six-point continuum. The study revealed that the participation of elected women respondents in performing Panchayat duties depended upon a number of factors such as availability of time, interest, motivation, venue, meeting agenda, health, participation of other women members etc. In comparison the sarpanches participated more than the panches. The author says that elected women need to learn new advocacy, leadership and decision-making roles which are very different from the traditional roles in order to be effective in leadership positions.

Upadhyay (2002) and Narayan (2003) are of the view that poverty and economic dependence prevent women from enjoying autonomy even after being elected representatives to the local level governing bodies.

Uma Joshi (1999) conducted a study in Gujarat with a sample size of 85 politically active women purposively selected from among party members. The study revealed that there are multidimensional problems ranging from personal to social and political fields. The main findings included: (i) Women’s reproductive role, ignorance and lack of interest prevent their political participation; (ii) Corruption and criminalization of politics, restrictions in using family wealth prevent women from entering
politics; (iii) Male dominated party structure and problems of fund collection obstruct women from participation in politics.

Indu Grover and others (2000) conducted a study in the CCS Haryana Agricultural University to find out the gender perception of voters towards women and governance. The sample comprised of 120 respondents, including 60 males and 60 females in the age group of 20 to 50 years. The data were collected through a well structured schedule designed for the purpose. Various appropriate statistical tools, viz., percentage, $x^2$ test, weighted score, rank and Spearman’s rank order correlation were used. The study revealed that attitudinal and social factors appear to play an important role in keeping women away from politics. Further it revealed that menfolk in villages are not ready to accept women as chairpersons of Panchayats, males want to speak on behalf of women, social norms do not encourage women to participate in Panchayat activities, the political awareness level of women is low and dummy women candidates are fielded.

Another study conducted by Jayabal and Dravidadamani (1997) to find out the level of awareness of women, particularly women Presidents, regarding the Panchayat Raj system, and to assess their planning and extension activities revealed that women had no awareness of the working of the Panchayat. The study was conducted in Lalgudi District of Karnataka State. A survey was conducted and, among other things, it was found that
most of the women were proxies and, as such, were helped by their relatives, particularly their husbands.

A study conducted by Ghosh in West Bengal revealed that political parties, even of the Left, are not ready to give offices of heads of institutions to women. Only at the lowest level women heads are found. The percentage of women in all the three tiers together was about 35 in the 1993 elections. Moreover, women representation as head of offices in different tiers of PRIs is not commensurate with their percentage in the bodies. In Zilla Parishads, there is no woman Sabhgaddi Pathi (Block Panchayat President). According to him, training support is necessary for the women to reap the benefits of the Amendment.

Likewise, in Kerala, Manu Bhaskar conducted a study in a Village Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram District among Panchayat level women representatives with the objective of finding out their socio-economic background and political motivation for these women leaders to come forward to grassroot level bodies. The study revealed that women’s representation has been influenced by caste and community and that the political parties maintaining a strong hold in the body politics can influence women’s participation.

Though the Constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to Indian women, there still exists a wide difference between Constitutional guarantees and the realities of women’s lives. Reservation for women at the
local government level is supported on the ground that it will provide an opportunity for women’s political participation. However, it is found that various factors such as lack of political party nomination, lack of family support and limitations on women’s mobility have been acting as deterrents to their participation in the political process. In spite of these hindrances, it has been observed that the overall performance of women elected representatives at the local government level is better than that of their male counterparts (PRIYA, 2002).

The main objective of another study conducted by Radha and Bulu Roy Choudhury (2002) was to find out the manner in and the extent to which women have participated in Panchayat Raj in Kerala in the discharge of financial, social and administrative functions and to make an assessment of the impact that their participation has made on local development. A field survey was conducted to collect data. 121 women representatives and 50 men representatives were selected from 35 Panchayats—21 with women Presidents 14 with men Presidents—covering 14 districts of Kerala. The study revealed that the elected women function under severe constraints which hinder their success as representatives in self-governance bodies. Anti-women customs and conventions prevent them from getting together on a common platform for women.
According to Mathew\textsuperscript{57} (2002), there are many instances wherein power is still not vested with women representatives. Instead, a new class of “Sarpanch patis” have emerged—husbands of women Sarpanches who manage the affairs of the Panchayat, while the women act only as rubber stamps.

A study conducted in one of the rural mandals in Andra Pradesh by B. Devipresad and S. Haranath\textsuperscript{58} (2004) on participation of Dalit women in the Gram Panchayat explores the role of reservation for women at the local level along with supporting and inhibiting factors affecting their participation in the Panchayat and the Gram Sabha meetings. The study reveals that women face difficulties due to purdah (veil), apprehensions regarding their ability to perform and lack of education, knowledge about the system, outside exposure and physical mobility.

In a Case study conducted by Santosh Singh\textsuperscript{59} (2004) in two Village Panchayats in the Agra District of Uttar Pradesh highlights the profile of two women Sarpanches—one SC and the other an upper caste. The role played by the SC woman is found to have acquired the negative image of a corrupt and obstinate Sarpanch who was a proxy to her husband. At the same time the study revealed that, in the process of political empowerment, the bargaining power of the SCs had improved as far as the village was concerned. With regard to the upper caste woman Sarpanch, who was elected to the post solely to fulfil her husband’s own aspirations and with
the influence of caste politics, participation in the activities of the Panchayat is absolutely absent. The strong patriarchal forces constrained her to “cross the threshold of her private space.” While she performed her household work and stay at home as usual, her husband took care of the affairs of the Panchayat. She signed all the papers she was asked to and never attended Panchayat meetings.

5. Other Related Studies

In her study, “Self Help Groups in Empowering Women”, Jaya S. Anand (2000) throws light on, among other things, the impact of SHGs and micro credit on women’s empowerment through an exploratory study on the functioning of selected SHGs and NHGs of Malappuram District in Kerala. A multistage sampling design was used for the selection of the sample and simple statistical tools like percentage, averages, coefficient of correlation and regression were used for the analysis. The analysis revealed that the political participation of the members was almost negligible. Though 91 percent attended the Gram Sabha they were of the view that there was no use in attending as the major share of the Panchayat funds went to politically affiliated persons. And with regard to social and psychological empowerment, the study says that it will take a long time to change the attitudinal as well as social barriers so that women will come up to equality with men.
Meenakshi and Ajith Kumar (2000) conducted a case study with the objective of making constructive recommendations for enhancing women’s participation in the provision of housing at all stages of planning in Kerala State. Beneficiaries were selected from three centrally sponsored housing schemes in Kannoor District. The study concentrates on women’s participation —presence, possibilities and challenges—in the programmes. Simple statistical tools like frequency distribution, mean etc., were used for analysis of the quantitative data. Qualitative questions dealt with assessment methods like the number and percentage against each attribute. The study revealed that women’s participation in all stages of the housing scheme planning was sure to enhance house quality and efficiency. It may be affected, however, by caste, literacy, and occupational status of the household and the regions in which the households are located. Moreover, it suggests that women’s participation in the planning and implementation process will definitely enhance the efficiency of developmental programmes.

The specific objectives of a study conducted by Achamina John (2000) in Kollam, Kerala, were the problems encountered by ST women in the family and society and the effects of special projects for ST and SC women. One hundred and sixty families were selected from two villages in two taluks of the district comprising of both female-headed and male-headed families. A structured schedule was used for data collection. The study revealed that the women are still oppressed and are incapable of
resisting partisan considerations. Social inequalities prevent them from attaining the benefits of development through Panchayat Raj’ institutions. And the Christian ST women have a better position than the Hindu ST women.

Paclma Ramachandran (2004), in her study “People’s Planning in Kerala,” traces the decision-making process in planning, beneficiary selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in two selected Village Panchayats and two municipalities. The survey finds that the majority of the people in the selected villages and one-third in the municipalities are not satisfied with the decentralised process going on in the state, as they find no effective role in the process of governance at the local level. It is found that Panchayat members are often compelled to violate norms in the interests of advancing party interests and also to retain the allegiance of voters in the ensuing elections. Middle and higher income groups and professionals seldom attend the Gram Sabha / Ward meetings, as they do not perceive direct benefits from participation. Mostly it is the BPL (Below Poverty Line) families, particularly women, who participate. Because of their social upbringing and experience, combined with low educational level, they can only listen, partly understand and rarely react. The survey makes it amply clear that training in articulation, group discussion, presentation, questioning and comprehension for people who attend the Gram Sabha meeting is necessary before they can be expected to contribute higher levels of participation.
Against the background of people’s planning in Kerala, a case study conducted by N.D. Gopinathan Nair (2002) in two Village Panchayats concluded that widespread misutilisation of the benefits distributed under individual beneficiary programmes and unproductiveness of a substantial part of the investments made in the productive sector have caused wastage of public funds. Local bodies had neither the expertise nor adequate manpower to utilise these funds within the elaborate guidelines and time frame prescribed by the government.

R. P. Nair (2004) conducted a study to find out the potential and feasibility of mobilisation of resources by Panchayats in Kerala. The study revealed that financial data on local spending is lacking in the selected six Panchayats in the six districts. There exists a mismatch between financial responsibility and financial resources required to fulfil the responsibility. Moreover, it is found that administrative expenses is the single most important item in all cases, absorbing 40 to 50 percent of the total finance. Expenditure on education, public works and core functions absorb only a small percentage of the total expenditure.

Literature on participation of women in various fields is available and some of them have been reviewed. There is no dispute among academicians or policy makers regarding the need for effective participation of women in all spheres of national life as equal partners. The available literature soundly substantiates the need for women participation.
But the lack of vision in policy formulation for a democratic state leads to
discrimination in facilities and opportunities, absence of control over
resources and decision-making etc. These factors increase the burden of
women and degrade their status in society and the family. Non-participation
is mainly due to factors alien to the woman’s own personal characteristics—
cultural, social, organizational, economic and political.

Conclusion

The review has helped to understand the existing factors and forces
that determine the participation of women in development and planning.
However, studies in general do not consider the hindrances that constrain
women from effectively participating in grassroot level development and
planning. While certain international studies attempt to provide a theoretical
framework to the problem, very few studies in India have tried to examine
the obstacles to participation objectively. In other words, a study on
women’s participation at the grassroot level has not been attempted
seriously in any study. The present study is an attempt in that direction, to
find out exactly what the hindrances to active participation of women in
grassroot level bodies are. In an era of decentralized governance it deserves
due consideration.
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