Chapter III
Political Participation and Women in India

3.1 Introduction

Democracy implies equality for all human persons, men and women. As against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. The U.N. observes that women constitute “world’s largest excluded category”. For the attainment of true democratic spirit shall be ensured better political participation. “In the struggle for gender justice”, Usha Narayanan argues, “political participation constitutes the first and foremost step in that direction.”

Equal treatment to women in political life, to be meaningful and effective should start from the grassroots level. To provide training and practice in the process of decision-making, the rural democratic institutions are the ideal structures to begin with. One of the aims of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is to accomplish this purpose. “The question of political empowerment of women in rural India has assumed considerable significance recently because of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The amendment provides reservation of seats and posts of chairperson for women in all grassroots level democratic institutions in the countryside known as panchayats. This is a historic step of far reaching implications and significant repercussions on the political process in rural India.”

“As long as women of India”, declared Mahatma Gandhi in 1925, “do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country”. He further declared, “As long as ..... women do not come to public life and purify.... we are not likely to attain swaraj”. “Ever if we did”, he added, “it would have no use for that kind of swaraj to which women have not made their full contribution.” The
recent constitutional amendment acts provided greater opportunities to women in various aspects of political life.

This chapter seeks to deal with the concept of political participation and role of women in the Indian and Kerala perspectives.

3.2 What is Political Participation?

The study of political participation of any society or section of people needs to take into account whether or not it is associated with democratic values. The level and extent of political participation of people may be restricted by the very existence of both natural and man-made inequalities. While it is impossible to overcome natural factors of inequalities, it is possible to overcome man-made inequalities simply by adopting and following of democratic principles and values. The pillars of democracy like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice etc. are strong enough to support and protect the people from the challenges posed by man-made inequalities.

Thus the study of the nature and level of political participation and its resultant empowerment can be evaluated only on the basis of the availability of democratic values. The presence of the umbrella of democracy is a pre-requisite for the attainment of maximum extent of participation and empowerment. Empowerment is not characterised as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change. Political participation is a major component of empowerment. "Research in participation and empowerment links them bi-directionally, empowered individuals may be more likely to participate in organisations, and participation promotes empowerment."4.

The term political participation generally refers to those voluntary activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the
right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in a democratic process.

Political participation is a basic ingredient of every political system. Participation helps the individual to be effective and associates him with the political system. Higher the rate and levels, the more varied the forms of political participation. It is vital to the proper functioning of a democratic polity. The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences defined political participation as the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. It signifies such proceedings like voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytising, attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives.

Many writers have rightly argued that political participation of citizens is the distinguishing mark of modern states. More than anything else, the modern state is distinguished from the traditional ones by the extent to which people participate in politics. High levels of political participation are usually associated with democracy, which is beneficial both to the individual and to the society. Political participation has been considered as a ‘sine qua non’ of democracy.

Political participation has been characterised as a civic duty, as a sign of political health and the best method of ensuring that one's private interests are not neglected. Although political power in every society is monopolised by a few, the incumbents of political authority in every system are found to be quite keen on ensuring some amount of political participation by the people. Thus, by involving the many in the matters of the state, political participation fosters stability and order by reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority.

Political participation is a term that has many meanings. The term is applied to the activities of people from all levels of political system. Sometimes the term is applied more to political orientations than to activities.
participation is defined in such a way as to include the exercise of power in non-
governmental as well as governmental spheres. It is true that there exists a great
deal of confusion with regard to what is meant by that term. "Participation may be
viewed from two angles again—intensity and width. How deeply a person is
involved in an issue and to what extent he would go towards achievement of this
objective would determine the intensity. Width arises because of the complex
nature of political activity that requires participation in different issues ranging
from casting votes to participating in a technical expert committee or becoming a
minister."^9

Political participation may be defined as those actions of private citizens by
which they seek to influence or support government and politics.10 This definition
is broader than most others, as it includes not only active roles that people pursue
in order to influence political outcomes but also ceremonial and support activities.
To Almond and Powell, "political participation is the involvement of the members
of the society in the decision making process of the system".11

McClosky defines, "political participation implies those voluntary
activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and
directly or indirectly, in the formulation of public policy".12

Verba and Pye define it as, "Those activities by private citizens that are
more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel
and the actions they take".13

One of the most controversial questions to be answered in arriving at a
definition of political participation is the element of will or intention of the people.
In the ultimate analysis political participation means a process of influencing the
authoritative allocation of values for a society.
For the successful functioning of democracy the maximum participation of people particularly at the lowest level is required. Panchayati Raj is an important political innovation and a vital conduit in independent India, for popular participation in democratic development. It is envisaged not merely as a method of implementation of rural development policies and the dispersal of developmental benefits, but more importantly, as a training ground for the promotion of local initiative with a view to increasing people's political consciousness, awareness of their rights and direct participation in self-rule.

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic setup. Nature, success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens. As women comprise about half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and a due share in process. Citizens’ active participation in political affairs in a democracy is crucial and necessary because it provides legitimacy to the system and also strengthens the democratic fabric. Democracy will fail in its objectives if women citizens lack equal opportunity to participate in the governmental decision-making process. They are to be equal partners in the nation-building and political development.

Political democracy requires at least a minimum of people’s participation in the decision making process. Citizens’ participation in political affairs is important because a situation which results in high participation by members of a group normally has higher potential for democracy. Norman D. Palmer defines political participation as the involvement of citizens in such political activities, which directly or indirectly influence the behaviour and actions of decision-makers. It may be viewed as any “Voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organised or unorganised, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, intended to influence the choice of public policies, the
administration of public affairs, or the choices of political leaders at any level of
government, local or national.  

It may be pointed out that all citizens do not participate equally or in the
same manner in any political process. The political culture of a society greatly
influences the nature of political participation of individuals. The real purpose
and impact of participation is to make the citizen not a passive spectator but an
agent in politics, to enable him to show his disagreement as much as to endorse
what is proposed, as much to scotch initiatives as to launch them, as much to
revise, criticise and block as to push, prod and hasten. However, if political
participation is to have any concrete meaning, particularly in a democratic setup,
people should directly or indirectly take part in the decision-making processes
which affect their day to day life.

3.3 Modes of Political Participation

The conceptualisation of political participation has been undergoing drastic
changes. Such changes will have a direct impact upon different modes of political
participation. Citizens can participate in different and alternative ways to
influence the government and the political system. Until recently most survey
studies of political participation confined their enquiry to a relatively limited set of
political acts. Most of them asked whether a person had voted or not and some
went on to ask about such behaviour as attendance at political meetings or rallies,
working for a party, making a monetary contribution or seeking a public
office.

However, these alternative ways of political participation depend on the
types of citizens who participate, the way in which they act, the amount of pressure
they can to exert and the system's response towards their activities. Thus political
participation is more than the vote and more than an activity in the electoral
system. Verba and Nie grouped into four broad modes of participation the
alternative activities by which citizens can participate in politics, i.e., voting,
campaign activity, co-operative activity and citizen-initiated contacts. Milbrath and Goel add protest and communication to these modes mentioned by Verba and Nie, which relate individuals to the polity. They are also of the view that political acts could be hierarchically organised from the least difficult to the most difficult, if a person performed a more difficult act, he was likely to perform those that are less difficult as well.

It is useful to consider political participation in a hierarchical sense, but it should also be born in mind that some levels of participation may be absent in some political systems. Not all political system have elections or a form of voting, some systems severely restrict or ban public meetings and demonstrations, while others forbid the formation of political parties and other types of political or quasi-political organisation, and so on. Explaining the extent of political participation Michael Rush and Philip Althoff added that apathy, alienation and the use of violence vary clearly and considerably from system to system, but remain quite important factors in any examination of political participation.

Examining the modes of political participation Schonfeld has mentioned ten types of activities which include (1) running for or holding public or party offices, (2) belonging to a party or other political organisation, (3) working in an election, (4) attending political meetings or rallies, (5) making financial contribution to a party or a candidate, (6) contacting a public official, (7) publicly expressing a political opinion to convince others, (8) partaking in political discussion, (9) voting, and (10) exposing oneself to political stimuli.

Political participation is the mother and politics is the child. The former creates and determines politics and hence is of utmost importance both for the nation and the individual. The politics of the nation is determined therefore, by political participation in all its processes.
3.3.1 Variables of Political Participation

Political participation appears to be a complex phenomenon, a dependent variable that hinges upon many factors such as the psychological, socio-economic and political, which provide orientation to individuals either positively or negatively.

3.3.1.1 Psychological Environment

Political participation tends to meet one's psychological needs of overcoming loneliness. It refers to the degree to which citizens are interested in and concerned about politics and public affairs. Psychological attachment of a person towards political objects certainly determines the extent and gravity of political participation.

In every society there are persons who are very much concerned and interested in political affairs and at the same time there are persons who have no such concern and interest in political affairs. This difference may be due to the differences in their psychological attitudes. In this situation it becomes clear that the former are more likely to be active in politics than the latter. Again it is generally believed that men are psychologically more involved than women in politics as in their respective field of activity.

3.3.1.2 Socio-economic Environment

The socio-economic environment will have a direct impact upon political participation. Socio-economic variables include education, occupation, income, age, caste, religion, sex, family background, residence etc. "Political participation", says Robert Lane, "is a function of age, sex, education and status". Thus generally, participation tends to be higher among better educated, members of higher occupational and income groups, middle aged, dominant ethnic and religious groups, people with political family background, settled residents, urban
dwellers and members of voluntary associations.\textsuperscript{28} However, the correlation between political participation and some of these socio-economic variables may vary from culture to culture in different political contexts and their effect on political participation may not be stable.

### 3.3.1.3 Political Environment

The overall political environments do influence the entire process of political participation to a great extent. The political environment refers to the nature of the party system, the electoral system, the means of propaganda and campaign, the extent of modernisation and urbanisation, the influence of ideology, the general awareness of the people etc.

The political party is the most potent instrument in facilitating political participation. The party resembles the nation both in its symbolic force and in its capacity for arousing affection, devotion and sacrifice on the part of its members and sympathizers. The party also inspires its members to develop a feeling of belongingness. It has been observed that people, who affiliated to a party vote more frequently than those who are not. Strongly attached members are more active in political discussions and work.\textsuperscript{29}

The propaganda and election campaign refer to the efforts made by political parties to involve the voters in the process of political participation. The campaign has its effect on polarising party attachments, reinforcing candidate preferences and gaining votes. It is, in fact, a process of political education. A significant aspect of the relation of the individual to his political environment is his exposure to the influence of propaganda.

Political participation is the hallmark of democracy and modernisation. In the traditional society government and politics are concerns of a narrow elite.\textsuperscript{30} There is positive relationship between urban residence and higher levels of
political participation. It has been argued that urbanisation, combined with other component process of social modernisation, would bind the citizens with new ties to the nation state and increase the extent of political communication that leads to greater political awareness.\(^{31}\)

Ideology can affect political participation, positively or negatively. Normally, those who have firm faith in democratic ideology positively respond to political participation. On the other hand, persons having contempt for democratic ideology show little inclination for political participation.

Political participation is associated with political awareness i.e., actual knowledge of political affairs. Awareness is highly connected with interest. In every society the number of citizens who can be described as ‘aware’ is extremely small. Awareness affects both the quality and amount of participation.\(^{32}\)

It is to be noted that the three sets of variables are closely linked and intermingled. A change in any one of them, can, therefore, increase or decrease the level of political participation.

3.4 The Non-participants

Another dimension that has to be taken into account is why some people keep off from all forms of political participation or even if they participate they are ready to play only a minimal role. In other words people who participate in most forms of political activity constitute a minority and often a very small minority. The factors, which inhibit political participation, are psychological and emotional. The non-participants are described as apathetic, cynical, alienated and anemic.\(^{33}\)

Apathy is characterised by individuals’ passivity or abstention from political activity. It may be defined as lack of interest or concern for persons, situations or phenomena in general or particular.\(^{34}\) Apathy leads to the decline of political vitality and vigilance. Widespread apathy increases the chances of
opportunists and unscrupulous people to dominate the policy making process. Thus it is nothing other than lack of interest in polities.

Morris Rosenberg has suggested three major reasons for political apathy. The first reason is perceived consequence of political activity. Second reason is that the individual may regard political activity as futile. The third reason is that political stimuli is an important factor in encouraging political activity and the absence of such stimuli may contribute to feelings of apathy.

Cynicism is a feeling that the actions and motives of others are to be regarded with suspicion. Robert Auger and his colleagues define cynicism as being contemptuously distrustful of human nature. It is observed that a person, who is extremely cynical may well feel that political participation in any form is futile and thus join the ranks of the totally apathetic.

Alienation is another form of non-participation with respect to a political system. While cynicism refers to a type of distaste for politics and politicians, alienation denotes actual hostility. Robert Lane defines political alienation as a "person's sense of estrangement from the politics and government of his society and the tendency to think of the government and politics of the nation as run by others for others according to an unfair set of rules."

According to Robert Lane anemic refers to "a sense of value loss and lack of direction". It denotes a psychological attitude in which the individual experiences a feeling of ineffectiveness. Thus while apathy means lack of interest and cynicism represents an attitude of distaste or disenchantment, both alienation and anemic imply a feeling of estrangement or divorce from the society.

3.5 Women and Political Participation

The present study is concerned not with political participation in general, but it is only a micro-level study concerned with political participation of women
that too at the grassroots levels of political functioning. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions has been an area of much interest in India. Participation in the local government institutions has been viewed as essential in promoting women's consciousness and development at the local level as well as in training them for participation in the wider politics.

Democratic thinkers have in general linked liberty to the people by the process of political participation. Participation is maximised in local government because, "local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within people's reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it." Karl Marx stood in favour of mass involvement in the process. To him political participation by the masses is at once a process of education and of building up of a capacity for governing the new society. It is a fact that woman herself is an important variable capable of determining the nature and scope of political participation and as a result the whole political system in turn.

The attempt to assess and evaluate the level and extent of political participation of women becomes very much relevant as to the nature and functioning of the political system as a whole. It is particularly more beneficial to political parties and political leaders due to the natural qualities of women such as honesty, affection and sense of duty. The mobilisation of women in large numbers weakened the bondage of tradition and encouraged them to develop a perspective on the wider socio-political problems.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10th December, 1948, its Article 1, proclaimed that, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Article 2 provided for equality of sexes. It states that, "every one is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of sex." It is considered as a clarion call for the cause of women empowerment. It is
not an argument for feminism. "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of colour, working class women."  

Milbrath and Goel observed that it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically. The changes brought by modern industrial societies are eroding this sex difference but the impact of tradition is still visible. Men tend to be more psychologically involved in politics than women.  

Studies on sex differences in the political behaviour usually focus on differences in early childhood socialisation. Tedin, et.al, however, give more importance to situational factors in sex related differences in political expressiveness than to socialisation or structural factors. Women are less politically expressive because the environment of the housewife or the menial sort of employment available to most women does not encourage them to take part in politics or give stimulation to collect and discuss politically relevant information. Female situational factors, which lead to less political expressiveness become institutionalised and passed on to future generations through the socialisation process, which in turn makes it more difficult for women to overcome situational disadvantages.  

The U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women which is considered as the Human Rights Bill of Women (CEDAW) came into being in 1979. This treaty upholds the following rights of women, (1). Their right to vote in all general elections and referendums and to be elected to general assemblies, (2) their right to participate in the formulation and implementation of governmental policies and to hold public offices and, (3) their right to participate in non-governmental and socio-political organisations.  

Discrimination against women, says Henry Chafe, finds in the deep rooted structure of society, in the roles women play and in a sexual division of labour.
which restricted females primarily to the domestic sphere of life. Therefore, it is argued that only substantial social changes capable of demolishing the structural basis regarding the traditional views of male and female roles is necessary to modify the existing trends in the political participation of men and women.

The political participation or the political behavior of human beings just like any other aspects of human behavior take place in a given socio-cultural setting. It implies that the political participation is affected by social structure, economic development and historical factors joining together. The political behavior of Muslim women should be understood in the Islamic perspective. It is observed that Islamic has given equal status in matters of religion and religious observations to men and women but politically they are unequal. Marcia Lee believes that, lack of female participation in politics stems from three factors, namely, children at home, fear of sex discrimination and perceptions of women that certain things are not proper to do.

The generally accepted sex-role socialization process is considered to be advantageous to males in the field of political participation although women may be interested in politics.

3.6 Women and Politics in India

The Indian society is full of paradoxes. On the one hand, foreigners come in hordes to our country in search of spiritual solace but on the other hand, Indians rank among the most corrupt people in the world. Again, on the one hand, India is spending millions, nay, billions to send satellites to space to prove its scientific prowess but on the other the state cannot provide almost half the population with the basic necessities of food, education, health and shelter.

The same paradox exists in the case of women too. On the one hand, the scriptures put them on a high pedestal. An old Sanskrit proverb is that, where the
women are held in reverence there do the gods reside. The traditional belief in the Indian society is that, a society grows if the women grow, if they partake of the spirit of progress, for they are proverbial domestic legislators, they are the matrix of social life.\textsuperscript{54} In the Indian mythology, even God is regarded as half man, half woman-'ardh-narishwara'. On the other hand, according to the UNICEF's recent international report, "The Progress of Nations 1997", more than 5000 dowry deaths occur every year in India.\textsuperscript{55}  

"Women’s lives in India and the world over are circumscribed by what can be termed as five ‘Ps’ Patriarchy, Productive resources access inadequacy, Poverty, Promotion advancement insufficiency and Powerlessness"\textsuperscript{56}. It is estimated that women do two-thirds of the world’s work. In exchange they receive only 10 percent of all the income and own a mere one percent of all the world’s means of production.

It is a fact that the real social status and the real level of political participation of women cannot be analyzed in isolation. On the contrary it is interlinked with the socio-economic conditions, political climate and inequalities inherent in the traditional social structure, its norms and values, customs and rituals. All these factors together determine the actual social status of women. Not only that, women’s status differs according to region, caste, class and religion and also on considerations of tribal, rural and urban areas.\textsuperscript{57} The status of a person is a great force in participating wholeheartedly in the developmental process. In the case of women, their inferior status relegated to them due to fundamentalism of tradition and religious beliefs blocked them from active participation in developmental process.\textsuperscript{58}  

Historically women are supposed to carry forward the traditions, norms and the values of society. The process of socialisation that they undergo in their families does not prepare them for non-traditional roles.\textsuperscript{59} Now, it is reasonable to
enquire about what the mainstream Indian culture expects a woman to be. In order to get a satisfactory answer to such a question, one will have to go through the corridors of the history of India.

3.6.1 Ancient India

In ancient India, reverence was given to women as mother's image, a symbol of life, strength and purity with immense capacity for patience, sacrifice and sufferings. In the Vedic and Upanishadic periods women enjoyed considerable freedom so far as political, social and educational activities were concerned and thus enjoyed a status and prestige in society. In homes, women were given superior position to that of men as they were treated as the embodiment of goddess of wealth, strength and wisdom. Woman was depicted as 'shakti', and it was an accepted belief that where woman is respected, there is divine presence. According to Manu, where women are neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless and that family quickly perishes, but where women do not grieve that family always prospers.

Rig-Vedic women played a key role in the family, in the society and even in the political life. They enjoyed a position of equality and were respected both in the family and society as well. They were not ornamental objects but co-partners in life, in its pleasures and hurdles, in its joys and sorrows. They were imparted education like men and enjoyed considerable freedom in their personal matters. These are evidences of women actively participating in the political activities. They participated in the deliberations of Vidhatha (the earliest folk assembly of Indo-Aryans) and Sabha along with men.

In short, it may be said that women enjoyed a fairly satisfactory position during ancient times. The communities as a whole showed proper concern and respect for women, allowing them considerable freedom in different activities of social and political life.
The Medieval period witnessed a gradual decline in the position and status of women in India. Women were considered weak and it was the responsibility of men to protect them. Since they were sensitive in temperament, they should be treated with love and care. They were considered dependent on men throughout their lives. In childhood, the father looks after her, in youth, the husband, and in the old age, her sons supported her. Therefore, all her life she had to depend on someone or the other and never enjoyed unrestrained freedom.

During this period, there emerged social evils like female infanticide, child marriage and the practice of sati in the Hindu society. Such atrocious practices were responsible for the deterioration of the status and role of women to a great extent both in the family and in the society. At the same time, the spread of Islam and the beginning of Sikhism provided a healing touch to the degradation of women. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, wanted women to be treated by men as equals. He said, “Within a woman is a man conceived, from a woman he is born, he is married to a woman and with her goes through life... Why call her bad. She gives birth to Kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one true God is exterior to woman.” However, it was a fact that the position of common womenfolk in the country remained miserable. Their only function was bearing and rearing of children. They were confined to the four walls of their homes, leading an ignorant and illiterate life.

3.6.2 The Reform Movements

The disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century and the consequent political anarchy added to the miseries of Indian women. When the British rule started, their position was the worst in the history of the country. From the ideological point of view, women were considered an inferior species. She was inferior to male having no personality and significance. From the social point of view, she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any right, totally
The struggle for the emancipation of women took place mainly in three directions – (1) to make necessary laws for social reforms; (2) to provide maximum opportunities for their education; and (3) provide them with the.
fundamental political rights. Attention was concentrated on the first two in the 19th and early 20th centuries whereas political rights of women got attention only during the last phase of the independence movement.

With the beginning of the twentieth century a number of organisations exclusively for women appeared among high-caste or elite women. The All India Women's Conference, The National Council for Women, Women's Indian Association of Madras etc. came into existence.

3.6.3 Women in National Movement

The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi inspired Indian women to enter the open field of politics. He recognized the importance of women's participation in the freedom struggle. He said, "In the non-violent struggle, women have an advantage over men, for women are in any way superior to men in their religious devotion. Silent and dignified service is the badge of her sex. Woman is sacrifice personified. When she does a thing in the right spirit, she moves mountains".

In the Non Cooperation Movement of 1921 and the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, new techniques like picketing and boycotting of foreign goods, liquor shops and non-cooperation in various governmental activities were used. Mahatma Gandhi had immense faith in the women's inner strength and their moral appeal. In various non-violent agitations not only the upper class urban women but at many places, simple unsophisticated rural women also assumed leadership. Women organised themselves into groups and were willing to join processions, face police firing and go to prison. They broke the salt law, picketed shops selling liquor and boycotted foreign manufactured cloths. There were also women who joined terrorist groups and helped in editing and distributing banned news papers and even manufacturing bombs.
The independence movement brought the two streams of politically involved womenfolk together, the elite and the masses, both participated in the struggles for independence.\textsuperscript{79} Mahatma Gandhi encouraged women to participate in all aspects and phases of nationalist activities, particularly in the constructive programme and the non-violent satyagraha, for it required not physical strength but moral courage and spiritual determination. Thus the nationalist movement was, for Mahatma Gandhi, not merely a political struggle but a means of regenerating and rejuvenating the society.\textsuperscript{80}

It was Mahatma Gandhi who gave a new direction, strength and inspiration to the freedom movement. He played a pivotal role in extending women's active participation in political life through the national movement. While he accepted the concept of women's rights to individual dignity and legal equality from the beginning, he had viewed their role in the freedom struggle as supportive of man in the earlier period.\textsuperscript{81}

Though the implications of Gandhian social philosophy were not fully realised even by his followers, the massive involvement of women in the freedom struggle resulted in the transformation of women's position in the eyes of society.

By the time of independence women from all sections of society had become active in politics. Direct political participation promoted women's confidence and self-reliance and broke the barriers of public and private dichotomies in their lives.\textsuperscript{82} However, while the basic issue of women's right to participate in politics was thus settled, the content of their political role continued to be an open question.\textsuperscript{83}

The social reform movement which began in the 19th century emphasized improvement of women's status through education, restriction of child marriage, improvement in the conditions of widows and provision of property rights to Hindu Widows.\textsuperscript{84} The reformers were not very much interested in establishing
equality in roles between men and women. They saw women as custodians of the family and responsible for the well being of children, inculcating in them the cultural values and heritage of the Indian civilization.\(^8\)

### 3.6.4 Women in Politics in Post-independent India

The constitution of free India has guaranteed all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and dignity through several provisions like documents of fundamental rights and directive principles. The constitution of India is the best in the world which has taken care of the underprivileged and the minorities. All our laws get their sanction from this constitution and any law which violates a provision of the constitution is declared unconstitutional.

The framers of the constitution realise that a true democracy requires not only equality but also justice. This notion resulted in the Indian constitution, which not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them.\(^8\)

Several articles are incorporated in the constitution in order to materialise the desired objective of equality and justice for the women in India. Besides the preamble, the articles of the constitution, which impinge on our subject of enquiry are Articles 14, 15, 16 under part III, Articles 39, 42, 44 under part IV, Article 51-A(c) under part IV A and Article 246 under part XI are noteworthy.\(^8\)

The right to vote can be said to be the starting point in the struggle of women for their political equality and participation. An analysis of the political participation of women by way of voting has been growing but with variations. The following table reveals the percentage of female voting in Lok Sabha elections since the first general elections in 1952.
Table 3.1
Percentage of Women Voting Participation in Lok Sabha Elections (1952-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male voting %</th>
<th>Female voting %</th>
<th>Difference with male voting %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>37.10</td>
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</tr>
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<td>63.61</td>
<td>68.17</td>
<td>+4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>70.90</td>
<td>57.32</td>
<td>-13.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.56</td>
<td>47.42</td>
<td>-5.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of various years*

The above table shows that from the first general elections women's participation by way of voting has been growing but not steadily. It has shown that there was a constant rise from 37.10% in 1952 to 38.77% in 1957 and 46.63% and 55.48% in 1962 and 1967 general elections respectively. In the following elections the women's percentage of voting kept on fluctuating. In 1984 there was a greater turnout of women voters, i.e., 68.17% which is 4.56% more than that of the male voting percentage (63.61). But again it declined to 57.32% in 1989 and 47.42% in 1991. The difference between male and female voting percentage shows that except in 1984, women always lagged behind men in voting turnout.

The political participation of women in terms of voting in elections is not pathetic compared to their participation and representation in law making and law implementing organs of the government. It doesn’t mean that women failed to play their role by being elected to various elective bodies of the government, particularly in Parliament and Cabinet. Recognising their role, Raj Bala says, “As
parliamentarians, they (women) have played important roles in the growth and development of parliamentary institutions in India. The following table shall be a true indicator of the low profile of women's representation in parliament between 1952 and 1991.

Table 3.2
Representation of Women in Lok Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Total no. of seats</th>
<th>women contestants</th>
<th>No. of women members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of various years

The table 2.2 shows that in the first Lok Sabha, out of 499 seats, there were 22 (4.40%) women members elected to the house in 1952. In the subsequent elections their number fluctuated. It was in 1984 that the highest number of women members, i.e. 44 (8.1%) out of 544 members entered the Lok Sabha. But this trend was not seen in the following elections. Their number was only 28 (5.30%) in 1989 and increased to 39 (7.1%) in 1991. That women's share in voting is not properly reflected in their overall representation in the highest law-making body of the country is a fact which should be taken into account while discussing women's political participation.
The table 2.3 gives a statistics regarding the representation of women members in the Rajya Sabha. Here also women's share is marginal in comparison to men. It was in 1980 that the highest number of women members, ie., 29(11.8%) sworn in as members of Rajya Sabha. After 1980, it assumed a diminishing trend and in 1991, there were only 17(6.9%) women in Rajya Sabha. This trend indicates that various ruling political parties in the respective states of the country are biased against women in nominating them to the Upper House.

Table 3.3
Representation of Women Members in Rajya Sabha (1952-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total no. of seats</th>
<th>Women members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of various years
Thus, the representation of women in the Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha is very low when compared with their voting strength. Their numerical strength is also marginal in decision-making bodies. Only a very limited number of women have succeeded in getting berths in the Council of Ministers. The following table 2.4 provides a clear picture as to their level of representation in the Union Council of Ministers.

Table 3.4
Women Membership in the Union Cabinet (1952-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>Cabinet Ministers</th>
<th>State Ministers</th>
<th>Deputy Ministers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India. Reports of various years

The above table clearly shows that only a very few women have succeeded in getting into the Union Cabinet. In 1962 there were six women members and in succeeding years the number went down and rose to the nine in 1991. The only notable element was the presence of Indira Gandhi, a different and extraordinary leader, who became the Prime Minister for two consecutive terms in 1967 and 1971 and again in 1980.

Thus it seems clear that the actual political power remained something of a male domain and only few crumbs are thrown to women. Women are unjustifiably
rare in the decision-making bodies. More over, if anybody is elected to such bodies they will have to struggle hard to be counted for notable posts. This is the real situation that exists in India in terms of political participation of women.

Throughout the world, one allegation is that women are treated as second class citizens. Often they are treated as subordinates to man almost in every place. As a result, the advancement of women seems constrained at all levels.89

The United Nations Organisation gave special attention to the empowerment of women. Its decade of Women's Development (1975-1985) generated a lot of interest throughout the world. India also took special interests towards the problems of women. At this juncture, a number of women organisations came into being and started fighting for women's causes. They took a positive approach that they should be perceived as dignified human beings instead of being treated as objects of pity.90

However, there was no meaningful effort to provide satisfactory representation for women in the legislative, executive and other similar bodies. Some cosmetic steps have been taken by both the Central and State governments just to ensure the women vote bank for election purposes.

It was in this background that in September 1991, the Congress Government under P.V. Narasimha Rao introduced the 73rd (Panchayats) and 74th (Nagar Palikas) constitutional amendment bills in the parliament. They were referred to a joint select committee and the Lok Sabha passed the bills on 22nd December, 1992 and the Rajya Sabha, the following day. Following the ratification by more than half of the State Assemblies, the President gave his assent on 20th April 1993, and the acts were brought into force by a government notification on 24th April 1993 as the 1992 constitution (Seventy Third and Seventy Fourth) Amendment Acts. The Acts provide for one-third reservation of seats and offices of chairperson to women in the local self-government institutions throughout the country.
3.7 Kerala Women and Political Participation

The political participation of women in any society needs to be examined on the basis of the position and status they enjoy in that society or the level of their empowerment. It is closely related with the political efficiency of a person. Political efficiency refers to, "A person’s belief that political and social changes can be effected or related and that his efforts alone or in concert with others can produce desired behavior on the part of political authorities". Democratic systems provide the people opportunities for political participation. Effective participation of the people is an indicator of true democracy.

Politics in the present day society is mainly a skill controlled area. Persons skilled enough to control the environment are definitely active in politics. Therefore political efficiency and personal control are closely related. Individuals having personal control perceive the political system to have great influence on their socio economic and other personal pursuits. For them the political system is the only source from which they can get some benefits, the decisions of the political system may also be viewed as interfering in their various pursuits and; they have an obligation to be concerned with the political process.

The study of political participation of women requires an undertaking of their social position particularly in terms of educational and health awareness. Historically viewing, women in Kerala also had several disadvantages in their social status like the women in other parts of the country. The matriarchal system which prevailed in the Nair community provided an amount of security and freedom to women compared with their sisters belonging to other communities inside and outside the state. To a certain extent, "they were economically integrated with the 'Tharavad' through the 'Marumakkathayam' system, the problem of dowry and widowhood did not bother them, education kept them in schools for several years and prevented them from marrying early, it also gave
them a broader perspective towards society and their role in it. All this enabled
them to enjoy a high status in society".93

Speaking about the status of upper class women in Travancore especially
Nairs and the like, Her Highness Sethu Parvathi Bhai, the then Maharani of
Travancore remarked in 1935, “The women is here recognised as the head of the
family and succession is traced through her. No restriction on the holding and
disposal of property and no inequalities regarding education, social life and
cultural growth have happened to our sex. Not only has our history afforded
instances of queens who have stamped their individuality on the chronicles of their
country but also in the fine arts and philosophy women have played a notable part.
The equality of women with men in matters of political as well as property rights
is today an established fact. Female literacy in Travancore has attained high
standards.”94

One should not however, think that women belonging to all classes and
castes enjoyed the position described by the Maharani. The picture applied most
appropriately to the Nairs and other well-to-do communities only. The remaining
large majority of women who belonged to backward classes, religious minorities,
scheduled castes and tribes were kept outside the pale of the above said
educational and social areas of development. As a matter of fact women belonging
to backward classes were not even allowed to cover their breasts as per the rigid
dogmatic approaches of upper caste Hindus. All the reforms whether, political,
social, economic or educational were intended to ameliorate the upper classes and
the backward lower classes were not even considered as human beings. The caste
system of Kerala is confined to the upper classes or ‘savarnas’ whereas the
backward and lower classes were called ‘avarnas’ who enjoyed none of the
privileges and rights granted to the upper classes. Social reformers like Sree
Narayana Guru Swami, Ayankali and the Christian missionaries have rendered
historic and yeomen services to the backward and lower class women to assert
themselves and find a place in the social and educational firmament of Kerala. The Communist and the Congress parties have contributed greatly to the liberation of backward women from their age old bondage imposed on them by the rigorous of casteism and superstitions. Women belonging to religious minorities especially Islam and Christianity received only an inferior status at home and outside owing to theological and traditional reasons. Man being the head, lord and master of the house possessed all the powers and rights, while women lived like slaves without rights within the four walls of their homes. Dowry system and harassment ranging from wife beating to wife burning continued to make life a hell on earth in the absence of proper legal protections and social intervention. Muslim women lived always under the threat of divorce and abandonment. Man's right to marry several times created a sense of insecurity among women. Ignorance of the teachings of the Bhagavat Geetha, Bible and the Quaran and incompetent and convenient interpretation of sacred books offered the menfolk a golden opportunity to manipulate them to promote their self-interests.

It is in this back drop that Kerala women's achievements in the fields of education and health should be both viewed and compared with their political participation and involvement in post independence era.

After the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956, the position and status of women have grown considerably. It is evidenced by the level of achievements that they have secured in the fields of education and health care. The popularly acclaimed Kerala model of development attributed much to the development of women's position and status in the society. It is believed that women achieved considerable progress in different walks of life. Here it is to be noted that despite their progress and achievement in educational and health care aspects which really stood at par with those of developed countries of the world, the fact remains that they failed to repeat the same success story in the political field.
Education and health are influential factors in determining the socio-political status of a person. Its five-fold implications are: (1) Intrinsic importance—being educated and healthy are valuable achievements in themselves, and the opportunity to have them can be of direct importance to a person’s effective freedom. (2) Instrumental personal roles—a person’s education and health can help him or her to do many things. They may be important for getting a job and capable of making use of economic opportunities. The resulting expansions in incomes and economic means can, in turn, add to a person’s freedom to achieve what he or she values. (3) Instrumental social roles—greater literacy and basic education can facilitate public discussion of social needs and encourage informed collective demands; these in turn can help expand the facilities that the public enjoy, and contribute to the better utilisation of the available services. (4) Instrumental process units—the process of schooling can have benefits of its explicitly aimed objectives, namely formal education. (5) Empowerment and distributive roles—greater literacy and educational achievements of disadvantaged groups can increase their ability to resist oppression, to organise politically and to get a fairer deal.

3.7.1 Women and Education

Women in Kerala have made outstanding gains in the field of education. Kerala is the only state where mass literacy has been achieved among women as well as among men. “Women’s literacy is supported by society and state, and there has never been any organised opposition to female literacy and education in Kerala.”

Women’s education was the key to mass education in Kerala. The march to complete literacy actually started with the spread of education among the poor and backward sections of the society. The favourable attitude of democratic governments and N.G.O.s to women’s education accelerated this process to a considerable extent. Regarding the universal education prevailing in Kerala in the
19th century, Protestant missionaries of that period recorded that there were no objections on the part of 'sudras' to girl's primary education. The struggle of the farmers of Kerala which started in the 1940s and lasted several decades were aimed at not only economic rights but also social and educational progress of society as a whole. In a way these struggles played a dominant role in the process of creating and developing a sense of rights among the people, to democratise village life and to create a favourable atmosphere for education and public health. The active role played by the successive governments in the distribution of food, employment generation, re-distribution of wealth, providing health and educational facilities, social security schemes etc. has contributed significantly to alleviate poverty in the state.97

It is considered that a cardinal feature of Kerala society and culture is the high rate of literacy and education. Literacy and in particular female literacy is an essential facilitator of Kerala's political culture, a crucial factor in the creation of public opinion and essential to that consciousness of individual and political rights that is so conspicuous a feature of social and political life in Kerala. The following table provides the proportion of literate persons in the population.

Table 3.5
Proportion of Literate Persons in the Population, Kerala and India: 1961-91

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Reports of various years.
The table above reveals the high level of literacy possessed by the people of Kerala, both male and female. In the matter of the proportion of persons in the population who are literate, Kerala and the other states of India are in different leagues. Kerala has, historically, been ahead of other states in this respect and today it is the only state that has achieved what UNESCO calls ‘total literacy’ or a state of society in which more than 85% of the adult population are literate.

In order to translate the upper hand gained by women in the field of education into political awareness and effectiveness, immediate steps should be taken to provide them job opportunities commensurate with their educational qualifications. Now, it becomes clear that an understanding of women’s work participation in Kerala, is relevant for the study.

The population of Kerala was 2.91 crores in 1991, of which 1.43 crores were men and the remaining 1.48 crores women. As per the above data Kerala was one of the rarest states where the proportion of population was in favour of women.

The outnumbering of men by women in Kerala is considered as an index of the better living conditions enjoyed by women in the state. But at the same time, it is wrong to assume that the better education and health care of women have produced fundamental changes in the social status of women. It is evidenced by the low rate of female work participation compared with men in the state. The table given below illustrates the level of work participation of both men and women in India as well as in Kerala.
Table 3.6  
Male and Female Work Participation – Kerala and India  
(in percent)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Kerala Male</th>
<th>Kerala Female</th>
<th>Kerala Total</th>
<th>India Male</th>
<th>India Female</th>
<th>India Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>65.66</td>
<td>19.70</td>
<td>42.68</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>42.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>44.89</td>
<td>16.61</td>
<td>30.53</td>
<td>52.62</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>36.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>47.58</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>51.56</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>37.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Reports of various years.  

As per the data in the above table, whereas the work participation of women in India in 1961 is 27.9%, the same in Kerala is 19.70%. In 1971, while the all India work participation of women is 15.9%, the same in Kerala is 13.5%. In 1981, whereas 19.67% of women in India were engaged in different types of work, the work participation of women in Kerala was 16.61%. Coming to 1991, the table shows that against the 22.73% of women’s work participation at the national level, in Kerala it is only 15.85%.  

The table explicitly indicates that the high level of educational qualification acquired by the Kerala women is not proportionately reflected in their work participation.  

Education is an important factor that influences the availability of jobs and the willingness to work. Generally speaking educated women get employment in the organised sector. Others are employed in the unorganised sector. The relationship between women’s work participation and educational status is interesting. Women who are not equipped with formal education have a higher level of work participation. It is an irony that women with school education have a very low job participation and this tendency persists up to the S.S.L.C level. It is
found that women who have secured higher educational qualifications tend to register higher level of work participation. Kerala women’s educational status and work participation can be illustrated in the form of a curve as shown in the following figure.

**Figure – 3.1**

*Kerala Women’s Educational Status and Work Participation*

Source: Compiled from 1991 Census Reports
The figure explicitly shows the fact that women without formal education and with higher educational qualifications record a greater level of work participation. It is a matter of concern that women with educational qualifications up to S.S.L.C. show the lowest level of work participation.

The 1991 census report provides a detailed data as to the full-time and part-time work participation of both males and females in Kerala. The following table illustrates the above said aspects of work participation of Kerala population.

**Table 3.7**

**The Population of Kerala in 1991 and the Number of Workers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work participation</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male female ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>142.89</td>
<td>148.09</td>
<td>290.98</td>
<td>1036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time workers</td>
<td>64.04</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>83.01</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time workers</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>1143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of workers</td>
<td>67.98</td>
<td>23.48</td>
<td>91.46</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-workers</td>
<td>74.90</td>
<td>124.62</td>
<td>199.52</td>
<td>1664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job seekers</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>30.01</td>
<td>1350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1991 Census Reports*

The table above states clearly that out of the total 290.98 lakh population of Kerala, 148.09 lakh are women and the remaining 142.89 are men. Out of the total 148.09 lakh women, 15.84% are workers whereas the remaining 84.16% are non-workers. Among 15.84% of workers, 12.8% constitute the category of full-time workers and the remaining 3.04% part-time workers. Among 84.16% of women non-workers, 11.64% constitute the job seekers.
As per the strict analysis of data in the above table, 84.16% of total women are non-workers in the sense that they are not engaged in any income generating jobs outside their homes.

Barring the aged, incapacitated and students, all the other women are involved in domestic chores which take up a major portion of their time and energy. As a rule, women whose domestic work, which is unproductive in the sense that it does not bring salary, though it, contributes immensely to the wealth, welfare and all around development of the family, are treated as unemployed by government and society. It is a striking feature of the table that women job-seekers outnumber their male counterparts. Out of total 124.62 lakh women who belong to the category of non-workers, 11.64% are job seekers whereas out of the total 74.90 lakh men who belong to the category of non-workers, only 8.9% are job-seekers.

3.7.2 Women and Health Care

Human Development Report (HDR’96) states, "Women in Kerala have shared the benefits of education and health with men to a far greater extent than elsewhere in India". Historically Kerala has done better than the rest of India in respect of key demographic indicators. In the eighties, Kerala’s position in respect of some major health transition indicators improved substantially, and Kerala began to achieve standards comparable with developed countries.98

Kerala though part of a developing country, has witnessed a unique advancement in education, health care and population control in a single generation, which equals the achievements of developed countries. Here one can take into account four indicators as representing the outcomes of the health and demographic transitions in Kerala: life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate, birth and death rates. "Kerala's health status has emerged as low mortality, high
morbidity syndrome. As for the morbidity pattern the diseases of poverty are seen to co-exist with the so called diseases of affluence”.99

One of the key indicators of Kerala’s health achievements is a high life expectancy at birth. Life expectancy at birth in Kerala is similar to the corresponding figures of developed countries classified as having achieved high human development. It is estimated that a man in Kerala can expect to live to be 69 years or 10 years longer than the average Indian man, and a woman in Kerala can expect to live 74 years, or 15 years longer than the average Indian woman. The following table presents some valuable data regarding life expectancy of males and females in India and Kerala.

Table 3.8
Expectation of Life at Birth in Kerala and India (in years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-60</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-70</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-75</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-81</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-87</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-93</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India Reports of various years

The table shows that life expectancy for men and women in Kerala has been higher than that of the all India level. Kerala women’s life expectancy marked 45.3 years during 1951-60 as against the 35.7 years of the all India level. The life expectancy of Kerala women reached 74.4 years during 1988-93 period, while the national average came only up to 59.4 years. The table also indicates that in
Kerala itself the rise in the life expectancy of women has surpassed that of men during the period of 1951-1993.

This increased life expectancy of women in Kerala which is equal to that of the advanced countries of the world highlights the truth that women here have gained phenomenal growth in their physical, social, educational and health conditions to a satisfactory level.

The birth rate in Kerala is also much lower than that of the all India average. The following table provides the data regarding the birth rates in Kerala and India.

Table 3.9
Birth Rates, Kerala and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951-61</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-71</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-81</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-91</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The table shows that Kerala’s birth rate during 1951-61 period marked 38.9 whereas the same in the all India level is 41.7 per thousand. During the 1961-71 period the birth rate of Kerala is 37 per thousand against the all India rate of 41.2. During the next decade the birth rate in Kerala is 26 per 1000 while the same with regard to India is 37.1. It is found that the birth rate of Kerala came down to 19.8 per 1000 whereas the same in India stood at 30.5.
The table shows that during the four decades, Kerala achieved the fantastic feat of bringing down its birth rate by about 50% whereas India as a whole succeeded in this direction only by about 25%. The reduction in the birth rate of Kerala has had tremendous impact on the status, health, living conditions and life expectancy of women. It is a clear indicator of the raised educational status and health awareness possessed by the women of Kerala.

Kerala’s low birth rate is associated with comparatively high rates of birth control. The Couple Protection Rate (CPR), which is the proportion of eligible couples that use long term or temporary methods of birth control, increased sharply in Kerala over the decades.100

It is supplemented with improved child health and higher levels of education, particularly of women which are among the most important reasons for Kerala’s low and declining birth rate and the general acceptance of a small family norm.101

On the other side, the death rate has also declined steadily in Kerala compared to the rest of India. The following table deals with this aspect.

Table 3.10
Death Rates, Kerala and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951-61</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-71</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-81</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-91</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that during 1951-61 period the death rate of Kerala stands at 16.1 per 1000, whereas the same in India is 22.8. During the 1961-71 period the death rate in Kerala registered 11 per 1000 as against the national rate of 19. Coming to 1971-81 period the rate comes to 6.9 against the all India rate of 14.8. In the 1981-91 period the rate in Kerala comes down to 5.8, whereas the all India rate moved to 10.2 per 1000.

The table reveals the fact that the progressive decline of birth rate in Kerala has been faster than that of the all India level. During the aforesaid period spanning over four decades the death rate of Kerala slumped from 16.1 to a creditable single digit of 5.8 per 1000 which shows the effectiveness of the multi-pronged efforts of the state in this direction. Coming to the all India level it is seen that the 22.8 per 1000 death rate in 1951-61 period came down only to 10.2 in 1981-1991. The strides Kerala made in the field of reducing death rate has had its direct impact on the status and empowerment of women in the state.

An examination of the infant mortality rate in Kerala has also been relevant in the study of women's social status and empowerment. Infant mortality rate of any society has definitely been conditioned to a large extent by factors like educational and health consciousness of the womenfolk. The following table deals with the infant mortality rate of Kerala and India between 1951 and 1991.
Table 3.11
Infant Mortality Rates, Kerala and India

(per 1000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951-60</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-70</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India Reports of various years
The table above reveals the fact that the infant mortality rate in Kerala came down to 16 per 1000 in 1991 from 120 per 1000 in 1951. Here it can be compared to the all India rate of 140 per 1000 in 1951 and 80 per 1000 in 1991. While Kerala succeeded in bringing down infant mortality rate from 120 per 1000 to 16, the all India rate comes down only to 80 from 140 over a period of four decades. It is definitely a notable achievement not only for the entire society but more particularly for the womenfolk in Kerala.

Here it is noted that education has helped Kerala women to reduce infant mortality considerably and improve the health conditions of women. Death rate connected with delivery has also come down considerably. Thus compared to the status of women belonging to other states in India, the women of Kerala enjoy not only better educational and health facilities but also better indices of standard of living. As far as the security of women is concerned, transport facilities and accommodations are of paramount importance. Around 98% of the villages in Kerala are inter-linked with transportation facilities. These facilities are available only to around 40% of the villages in India. Barring the north-eastern states, Kerala has the lowest number of people without own houses. Own house is the biggest dream of a woman. In the matter of drinking water only 240 per 1000 women in Kerala have to go out of their houses while 581 per 1000 women in India have to go out for the same. These are all considered as clear indicators of the high status that the women of Kerala have been enjoying.

3.7.3 Kerala Women and Political Participation

The invisibility of women in the public domain of Kerala, despite the remarkable improvement of their educational and health status, is a paradox that has drawn considerable attention during the recent years. While Kerala's many commendable achievements in human development have undoubtedly had a beneficial impact on its women in several important aspects, a great deal remains
to be done in the state in terms of women’s empowerment and political involvement. This is unlikely to happen as long as the status of women in Kerala continues to be viewed through rosetinted spectacles. In reviewing Kerala’s development experience, it may be worthwhile to pay some attention to the question whether Kerala’s development model has been adequately sensitive to the gender factor in development.\textsuperscript{102} Traditional development indicators suggest that the status of women in Kerala is extremely good, especially in comparison with the situation of women in most other parts of India.\textsuperscript{103}

When major decisions and policy formulations are taken every day in different parts of the world on important issues it is a fact that women’s views and opinions are always sidelined.

However, the U.N.O’s decision to observe Women’s Decade (1975-85) and the convening of a number of world conferences on women in different parts of the world have helped to bring women’s issues in to the limelight. Despite the various reform measures and legislations initiated by all the major nations of the world including India, women’s status, instead of being elevated and improved, remained as miserable and backward as in the past.

The political awareness and participation of women in Kerala have to be evaluated in the light of the facts mentioned above. At the very outset, it is to be noted that the studies on the women of Kerala bring out the truth that their exalted status in the realms of education and health care is not reflected in the same measure in their political participation and involvement. It is a deplorable fact that even after five decades of independence, the level and extent of women’s political participation is confined just to the exercise of franchise and their presence in the elected bodies and decision-making process is shockingly minimal even in a state like Kerala. It is evidenced by the meagre presence of women in Kerala Legislative Assembly from the very inception of the state. The following table presents the
number of women who contested and were elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly between 1956 and 1991.

**Table 3.12**

Women Participation in Assembly Elections in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total no. of seats</th>
<th>No. of women contestants</th>
<th>No. of elected women</th>
<th>Women %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of various years.*

The table indicates that in 1957, 9 women contested in the elections to 127 member State Legislative Assembly and 6 were elected which puts women's share in the assembly at 4.72%. In 1960, 13 women contested to the 127 member house and 7 were elected bringing their share to 5.51%. In the next election in 1965 out of 10 women contestants, 3 were elected and their share in the Assembly came down to 2.23%. In the 1967 elections the number of women contestants was 7 and only one was successful marking a total share of 0.74% in the 134 member Assembly. In the 1970 elections out of the 8 women contestants, two were elected to the Assembly marking 1.49% of their share in the Assembly. In 1977 elections
the picture relating to women's share in the State Assembly showed its lowest level. Out of the 11 contestants to the 140 member assembly only one got elected which puts women's share in it at a mere 0.70%. In 1980, 13 women contested and 5 were elected and thus women's share in the assembly stood at 3.54%. In 1982, 17 women contested the elections and only four were elected putting total women's share in the assembly at 2.83%. In 1987, 34 women entered the election fray and 8 were sent to the Assembly marking a notable increase in the number of contestants and a small progress in the number those who were elected. In 1987 women's share in the 141 strong state Assembly stood at 5.67%. In 1991 elections the total percentage of women's share in the Assembly remained the same 5.67 though the number of contestants came down to 26.

A cross examination of women's share in the state Assembly between 1957 and 1991 shows that their presence in the highest democratic institution in the state remained extremely low. When the number of contesting and successful candidates is taken into account, one thing that strikes everyone is that women's participation in the election fray has been negligible and far below the optimum level. Although women have registered enviable success in all other walks of life, which demand administrative skill and intellectual acumen, they have not left their imprint on the political spectrum, which has remained a man's domain even after independence. Deliberately or otherwise women have been kept out of election fray remains a fact which deserves close scrutiny and lively actions. All the political parties, which clamour for women's representation and empowerment, have failed to consider a woman at the time of nominating the Anglo-Indian representative to the State Assembly.

3.7.4 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and Women

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act came into force in April 1993 and accordingly all the states have amended their laws relating to local self-
government. As a result, the role and importance of Panchayati Raj structure became highly critical as well as meaningful. The panchayat can emerge as model of an effective local organisation representing the interests of the people. State agencies can formulate and support policies, while panchayats serve as potential instruments for an effective delivery of programmes and services.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act shall be a landmark in the constitutional development of India. Since it is for the first time in the political history of India that one-third of the total seats in local self-government institutions have been statutorily reserved for women, the legislation has several important implications for the empowerment of women. It has made a silent revolution in the country.

In the Indian context, a constitutional amendment became necessary in order to ensure active participation of women because of the prevailing socio-economic and political condition of women in India. Indian culture and social ethos have, to a large extent, been influenced by a patriarchal value system. As a result of deeply entrenched social attitudes and practices, women by and large have not been independent decision-makers in the country. The wishes and dictates of male family members have influenced the decisions in most cases. As a result they are discriminated against in terms of access of food and health care. Besides, they are discriminated in economic and political spheres too. The most alarming factor regarding women is that visible and invisible violence and harassment against them are increasing. The crudest form of violence, killing a girl child before she is born, exists in many parts of the country.

Manu Bhaskar explains the biological factors of limited participation of women in politics. She argues, "The inferior status of women in political institutions also results from the underlying biologism (biologism means a prejudice based on sex which determined gender roles by biologically assigned
characteristics) of male gendered politics for gender equality. In ancient India women enjoyed equal status with men. Democratic decentralisation will be a success, only if all the sections of people participate in the activities of the local self-governing bodies. So women population must be properly represented in different governmental agencies, which should start with village panchayats.

It is generally accepted that the political participation of women is very much related to certain important aspects of women’s life such as marriage, family and employment. Manu Bhaskar says that, “there is no country in the world today, where women have equal status with men in all the major areas of life-famil y, health, reproduction, education, work, government, and cultural expression.”

It is in this background that one should analyse the far reaching implications of reservation of one-third of seats and offices of chairperson for women guaranteed by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. It ensures compulsory involvement of women in all grassroots level political institutions. Bidyut Mohanty argues that, “However, the reservation itself can only be regarded as the first step in this direction”. A comprehensive effort will have to be made in this direction. It is necessary to create proper social, economic and political conditions to enable women to participate effectively in the local government institutions without endangering the positive values of the prevailing family systems.

It is believed that legal and constitutional support and legislative measures are necessary for bringing about social change. Together with them, the political will and awareness of people are crucial for bringing about democratic decentralisation, a reality by all means.

Thus in order to be effective and meaningful, a three-dimensional approach-represented by the political will of the people, people’s general political awareness and the constitutional and legislative measures - has to be developed. By the 73rd
Constitutional Amendment Act, the local self-governing institutions received greater status and relevance. Moreover, the Panchayati Raj has become the third-tier of governance in India.

3.8 Conclusion

Notwithstanding the honorific position granted to women in the pre and post Aryan period and in the Vedic times, that too in a substantive and mandatory manner, made binding on society by the tenets of religion and observance, women of later periods spanning between the middle and modern ages have been denied their rightful place of honour owing to a variety of reason both religious and mundane. Indian society, a vortex of innumerable caste and communal combinations, has paid scant regards for the education and welfare of women culminating in child marriage, sati, ban on widow marriage, and divorce, to name a few atrocities on them. It is a pity that the rulers never tried to irritate the orthodox religious beliefs by initiating reform, which would enhance the prestige and status of women. Even the few women who hobnobbed with Mahatma Gandhi and the frontline leaders of the freedom movement were from rich and educated milieu and did not represent the backward and downtrodden womenfolk of India subjected to all kinds of exploitations and tortures. The leaders of both pre and post independent India paid nothing but lip service to the upliftment of women in various walks of life including rightful representation in the legislatures, both at the centre and in the states, with the result that even now women do not enjoy pride of place in the power centres of legislation, administration and party leadership. It is to be viewed with concern that NGOs which played a dominant role in social renaissance elsewhere in the world with remarkable success, have not paid due attention in India to the cause of women’s political participation and empowerment which would have transformed the face of its administration, political culture and sense of values considerably for the better.
A close examination of the reasons behind the poor participation of women in the electoral politics of Kerala, noted for its progressive mindset and enlightenment coupled with high rate of literacy, brings out some glaring truths about the double standards adopted by the people and political parties of Kerala with regards to power sharing with women. As a rule, the menfolk of Kerala, possessive in nature, abhor the idea of letting their women jostle with other men in political work especially after dusk. As we know, most of the discussions relating to policy formulations, agitational programmes, seat sharing and organisational activities of political parties are held at night and it naturally precludes women's participation. The religious and caste factors have had tremendous impact on women's participation in electoral politics, especially after the formation of the state of Kerala comprising of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Educated women think that it is below their status to mingle with people belonging to low castes and economically and educationally backward sections. Politics does not bring returns to the women activists who have got to support their families and keep their husbands and in laws in good humour. The higher the women's qualifications the lower their fighting spirit.

The malefolk think that politics is a challenging career, which demands perseverance, fighting spirit, ideological convictions and allegiance to the party they belong. Hard work, extensive travels, the capacity for fund raising and building up party units are not tasks, which people without grit and dynamism can handle. It is generally believed that politics is bed of roses on which anyone can be laid. Experience shows that those who come up in politics are subjected to all sorts of tribulations, backbiting and crises which no ordinary mortal can stand. Women of Kerala who are accustomed to the comforts of a secure and happy family life with husband and children can never take up the challenges of leading agitations which may land them in police lock-ups where third degree methods are likely to be exerted on them.
The political parties of Kerala dominated by menfolk are not at all interested in providing space for women in electoral politics especially when their electoral chances are threatened, if and when women claim their pound of flesh, man will definitely stand to lose. It is a fact that almost all political parties which are paying lip services to women's reservation and participation in electoral politics from house-tops seldom consider women when the time for seat sharing comes. All the political parties in Kerala are unanimous on one thing that no woman should hold the Presidency of a political party or Chief ministership of the state.

It is in this backdrop that the relevance and significance of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which include provisions for women's empowerment in terms of reservation of seats and offices of chairperson in Panchayati Raj and Nagarapalika institutions should be examined. Despite the fact that the above said Acts are confined to the grassroots levels symbolised by the Panchayati Raj and Nagarapalike institutions, their impact on national politics and women's empowerment with unpredictable ramifications has produced a democratic revolution wherein women are given a golden opportunity to prove their mettle and administrative skills at par with men. The performance of women as elected representatives and chair persons has proved beyond the shadow of doubt that they are not behind men in administrative skills, organisational capacities and political insights which were hitherto considered the monopoly of men. The new surge in women's empowerment and awakening bid well for the nation which in the near future may allot more seats to women in State and Central Legislatures. Women's clamour for one-third reservation of seats in the state and national legislatures may meet with success before long. Any way, all the political parties though dominated by menfolk have agreed up on the idea that women should get reservation in legislatures though there is disagreement on the percentage of reservation. It is hoped that before long a consensus may emerge on
the issue of women’s reservation among political parties of India and women will get their rightful place in central and state law-making bodies.

An extensive and detailed study on women’s representation in the legislatures of both developing and developed countries has brought out the truth that India’s record in providing adequate representation to women in legislative bodies, though not satisfactory, is far better and hence cannot be called dismal.
References


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103. Ibid., p.479.


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