

INCREASING LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND FALLING LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF KERALA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Labour force participation among women in most of the developing countries is rising in recent years. In India also this trend can be witnessed even though the work participation rates are less compared to all other countries. Education is identified as a factor contributing to WPR. But in Kerala, female work participation rate appears to be lower and showing a declining trend despite its achievement in the field of female education. Hence, in this paper a modest attempt is made to probe the trends in female work participation rates, nature of the education system and the reasons for the decline in the work participation rate among females. The study found that the work participation of females are declining even though female education in the state is making headway. Faulty education system in the state of Kerala, predominance of arts and science colleges with conventional courses, huge fees charged in the self-financing colleges, lack of professional colleges in the government sector, gender discrimination etc are some of the factors identified leading to low work participation of women.

INTRODUCTION

Labour force participation of women has become a matter of interest among economists and gender activists for a long time. Female participation in economic activities brings forth multiple benefits like reduction in population growth and poverty, improvement in child survival and development (Mahendra Dev, 1997). Women's participation in labour force has been on the rise in many countries of the world during the last few decades. Asian countries prove to be something of an anomaly here; the participation of women is significantly lower than men, though they differ widely among different countries of the region. The ILO Year Book of Labour Statistics 1991 provides ample support to this proposition. While the LFPR for men in the prime age group well exceed 85 per cent in most South Asian countries, those for women in the age group 15-64 are estimated to be 9.6 per cent in Bangladesh, 31.8 per cent in India (15-59 age group), 45.7 per

cent in Nepal, 11.8 per cent in Pakistan and 49.4 per cent in Sri Lanka(15-59 age group) (Jose,1992).

India, a country which is a trailblazer in a lot of ways also exhibits an abysmal situation when it comes to participation of women in the labour force. Falling participation of women in employment was first cited by Gadgil (1938) in 1924 but proper concern on this issue was accorded only after the independence of the country (GOI, 1975). Details about work participation rates furnished by the Decennial Censuses show that figures for the years 1981,1991 and 2001 provides a much less work participation rates for females in India, though it exhibited a steady increase from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.7 per cent in 2001(in 1991 it was 22.3 per cent). Several studies have suggested and identified some of the possible determinants of the slowly increasing female work participation in India. Among these, education is an important determinant. The role of education in enhancing labour force participation has been proved beyond doubt.

In Kerala, a small state lying in the extreme south of India which enjoys the highest position at the literacy front (both male and female), surprisingly, the work participation rate among females shows a declining trend. Despite the high literacy level in Kerala, female work participation rate appears to be quite low and falling. Rising female education should be followed by a rising level of work participation rates. But the opposite is true in the case of Kerala women, which makes one wonder, what is the reason for such declining work participation rates? Against this back drop, the paper intends to examine the following:
- 1) trends in the work participation rates 2) level and nature of female education in Kerala 3) reasons for the declining work participation rates of women.

An account of the state Kerala and the females living there would help in a better understanding of the issues. Kerala, known as “God’s Own Country” (the expression used by the State Government of Kerala to promote tourism in the state) is a small, beautiful state lying in the southern part of India. It represents only 1.18 per cent of the total geographical area and accommodates 3.43 per cent of the total population of the country. The Gross State

Domestic Product (GSDP) of the State was estimated to be Rs.1,32,738.53 crores at current prices during 2006-07 and the tertiary sector constitutes the major contributor to it with 61.3 per cent of the total. The contribution of the primary sector to GSDP is declining (16.3 per cent) while that of the secondary sector remains almost the same (22.2 per cent) (Economic Review, 2007).

Profile of Women in Kerala

The gender profile of Kerala exhibits some interesting features. Women account for 51.4 per cent of the total population of the state. The sex ratio of the state has been consistently favourable to women and it is the only state where women outnumber men in India. The women of Kerala are in a better position in terms of social development indicators such as education and health. The life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rate also favour women in Kerala. A girl born in Kerala can expect to live twenty years longer than one born in Uttar Pradesh, and she can expect to make the important decisions in her life, to attend college, choose a profession, do what others might consider “men’s work” and inherit property (something which, before the law was changed resulting in the Indian Succession Act, 1956, Indian women could not expect to do, unless they were Malayalis following the “marumakkathayam” or matrilineal system) (Tharoor, 2007).

Table 1 provides an illustration of the gender profile of Kerala and India.

Table 1. Gender Profile of Kerala and India on Select Indicators

	KERALA	INDIA
Sex Ratio(Females per 1000 Males)	1058	933
Birth Rate (per 1000 population)	16.70	24.80
Death Rate(per 1000 population)	6.30	8.0
Infant Mortality Rate(per 1000)	11	60
Child Mortality Rate(per 1000)	2.6	29.3
Maternal Mortality Rate(per	10.30	4.37

1000)		
Life Expectancy at Birth		
Male	71.67 years	64.10
Female	75 years	65.80
Literacy Rate %		
Male	94.20	75.85
Female	87.86	54.16
Girls in School education (%)	49.19	
Plus two courses (%)	53.75	
Polytechnics (%)	10.06	
Graduate level (%)	67.47	
Post Graduate level (%)	78.20	
Female Headed Households (%)	22.1	10.3
Human Development Index	0.638	0.572

Source: Economic Review, 2005.

Kerala has the unique distinction of having a literacy rate which is comparable to the most developed countries of the world. Kerala's rate of expansion of female literacy has been faster than China's. Kerala has also shown a faster decrease in fertility rate. While Chinese fertility rate decreased from 2.08 to 2.0 between 1979 and 1992 (when one child policy was introduced) it fell from 3.0 to 1.8 in the same period in Kerala without any coercion (Sen, 2001). Kerala's male and female literacy rate of 94.20 per cent and 87.86 per cent are well above the corresponding national figures of 75.85 per cent and 54.16 per cent respectively. The decadal growth rate of female literacy rate is 1.69 per cent (1991-2001) as against the male literacy growth rate of 0.58 per cent. The gender gap in literacy rate which was 7.45 per cent during 1991 came down to 6.34 per cent in 2001. Despite these achievements, the system of patriarchy has conditioned the majority of women of Kerala to play a secondary role in social economic and political spheres. The political participation of the women is negligible accounting for less than 10 per cent of the total. There is only one woman minister in the entire cabinet of 21. The number of women in higher positions of Civil Services is also pretty low. There is also evidence to show that women do not enjoy the kind of 'freedom' that one would expect them to have given the high levels of human or gender development (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Kerala which ranks first among the Indian states in terms of Human

Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) however presents a weak picture with regard to female work participation.

WORK PARTICIPATION RATES IN INDIA AND KERALA

The Work Participation rate (WPR) is defined as the proportion of workers to the total population. It is often considered as an indicator of economic advancement of any state or country.

Trends in employment are mostly assessed and analyzed on the basis of data from two sources: the Decennial population Censuses and the various rounds of National Sample Survey (NSS). Though the two sources measure the work participation in somewhat differing conceptual frameworks, the results from the two broadly explain the same phenomenon. In all these surveys a 'worker' is usually deemed to be a person engaged in 'economically productive work' including work that is remunerated and work in family farm or enterprises for which no separate, distinct payment is made. The work participation rate in India is seen to be higher for males than females, both in rural and urban areas.

The total workforce of Kerala as per 2001 Census is 102.92 lakh comprising 82.37 lakh main workers and 20.55 lakh marginal workers. The marginal workers are those who are unable to get work for more than half the year (183 days). Out of the main workers, 17.57 lakhs (21.3 per cent) are female main workers and 7.43 lakhs (36.5 per cent) are female marginal workers.

Table 2. Work Participation Rates in India and Kerala - 1981-2001

Census Year	India			Kerala		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
TOTAL						
1981	36.7	52.6	19.7	30.5	44.9	16.6

1991	37.5	51.6	22.3	31.4	47.6	15.9
2001	39.3	51.9	25.7	32.3	50.4	15.3

RURAL

1981	38.8	53.8	23.1	31.3	45.2	17.7
1991	40.0	52.5	26.7	32.1	47.9	16.9
2001	42.0	52.4	31.0	32.6	50.2	15.9

URBAN

1981	30.0	49.1	8.3	27.4	43.4	11.8
1991	30.2	48.9	9.2	29.6	46.8	13.0
2001	32.2	50.0	11.6	31.6	50.8	13.5

Note: For 1981, the work participation rate for India for total, rural and urban areas was worked out excluding Assam and Jammu & Kashmir and for 1991, it was calculated excluding Jammu & Kashmir. In 2001, the figures for India exclude Kutch district, Morvi, Maliya-Miyana & Wankaner taluks of Rajkot & Jodiya taluks of Jamnagar district of Gujarat State.

Source: Census of India, 2001, Provisional Population Totals, Paper 3 of 2001.

Table 2 presents the work participation rates for males and females in India and Kerala. The work participation rate (WPR) is significantly higher for males than for females in rural as well as urban areas both at national level and in Kerala. However, the gap between male -female WPR is higher in Kerala as compared to India. The female WPR in Kerala was falling continuously from 16.6 to 15.9 and 15.3 per cent for the Census years 1981, 1991 and 2001 respectively and it was much below the national average of 19.7, 22.3 and 25.7 per cent. With 2001 Census, the gap in female WPR becomes much wider as there is a 10.4 per cent difference (25.7 per cent - 15.3 per cent = 10.4 per cent). Another noteworthy trend in female WPR in Kerala is that rural WPR is higher than urban WPR, though it is also declining (from 17.7 per cent in 1981 to 15.9 per cent in 2001). Yet another feature of WPR of females in Kerala is that in the urban areas, work participation rate has been rising steadily from 11.8 per cent to 13.0 per cent and then to 13.5 per cent during the Census years 1981, 1991 and 2001.

The NSSO data provides a different picture. It is well known that Census underestimates work participation rates (WPR), in particular of women, while the methodology and concepts used by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) ensures a better enumeration of the work force. The latest NSSO Round data for the year 2004-05 shows much higher WPRs for males and females compared to the Census (Table3). However, unlike at the all India level where WPRs have increased among men and women, in rural and urban areas, for Kerala the increase is muted. Rural female work participation rates have increased slightly whereas those of the urban areas have remained stagnant since the early 1990s as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Work Participation Rates by Usual Principal & Subsidiary Status in Kerala and India from 1993-94 to 2004-05 (in %).

	KERALA			INDIA		
Year	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05
Rural Male	53.7	55.3	55.9	55.3	53.1	54.6
Rural Female	23.8	23.8	25.6	32.8	29.9	32.7
Urban Male	55.9	55.8	54.7	52.1	51.8	54.9
Urban Female	20.3	20.3	20.0	15.5	13.9	16.6

Source: Economic Review, 2007.

The distribution of workers in primary and non- primary sectors in Kerala during 1961 to 2001 is given in Table 4. While the percentage of males and females employed in the primary sector has shown a decline in rural and urban areas it has increased in the non- primary sector. The work participation of both males and females in the rural areas has been marked by a consistent decline since 1971. With regard to female work participation the major change between primary and non-primary sectors has occurred during the period 1991 to 2001. For instance, in rural areas, while female work participation rate recorded a decline of 38 per cent in the primary sector, it increased by 40.9 per cent in the non- primary sector.

In urban areas, female work participation rate declined by 55.25 per cent in primary sector and increased by 15.45 per cent in the non- primary sector.

Table 4

Work Participation Rate in Primary and Non-Primary Sectors by Sex and Residence in Kerala, 1961-2001

Year	Primary		Non- primary	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
<hr/>				
Rural				
1961	41.1	46.9	58.9	53.1
1971	53.4	58.2	46.6	41.8
1981	47.1	55.6	52.9	44.4
1991	35.5	51.6	64.5	48.4
2001	27.6	31.8	72.4	68.2
Urban				
1961	7.2	15.4	92.8	84.6
1971	8.9	20.2	91.1	79.8
1981	10.5	18.2	89.5	81.8

1991	11.9	21.9	88.1	78.1
2001	6.7	9.8	93.3	90.2

Note: Cultivators and agricultural labourers included among Primary sectors and others

Source: Compiled from various Census reports.

It is seen that the primary sector still remains the largest provider of employment for both men and women in India, but in Kerala only less than half the labor force is employed in the primary sector. A number of factors have contributed to the decline in the work participation rates:-1) aversion to manual labour by the newly educated youth 2) keeping of land fallow by even small land holders due to absence of lease provisions as well as due to mounting wages 3) shifts in the cropping pattern in favour of perennial crops like coconut, rubber etc. The demand for labour, especially female labour is comparatively less in the cultivation of coconut and rubber where as it is much higher in paddy as women are engaged in transplanting, weeding and harvesting activities. This has reduced female labour absorption considerably and generated more employment for men. For instance, area under paddy declined by 40 per cent in the 90s. Yet another reason responsible for this phenomenon is the relatively faster growth of agricultural wages in comparison to output prices which made farming less attractive. For example, in 1960, one quintal of paddy could purchase 29 man days of labour while 40 years later the same quantity is worth only about five man days (Economic Review,2005) The shifting of female agricultural labourers towards self-employment, the collapse of the traditional industries like coir, cashew, handicrafts and handloom which are female labour intensive also have paved the way for the decline in the female work participation rate. At present these industries are in a vulnerable position due to unfavourable terms of trade and acute competition from machine made and synthetic products.

Status of Employment

The distribution of workers as self, regular and casual status is generally regarded as an indicator of the quality of employment and conditions in the labour market.

Table 5. Category-wise Distribution of Workforce in India and Kerala-1987-88 to 1999-00.

	Self Employment			Regular Employment			Casual Employment		
	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00
INDIA									
RM	58.66	57.7	55.0	10.0	8.5	8.8	31.4	33.8	36.2
RF	60.8	58.6	57.3	3.7	2.7	3.1	35.5	38.71	39.6
UM	41.7	41.7	41.5	43.7	42.2	41.7	14.6	16.1	16.8
UF	47.1	44.8	45.3	27.5	29.2	33.3	25.4	26.0	21.4
KERALA									
RM	44.6	40.8	38.1	12.2	12.3	13.0	43.2	46.9	48.9
RF	57.7	55.0	53.0	9.4	9.7	15.0	32.9	35.3	32.0
UM	41.0	37.5	37.4	32.6	26.8	28.0	26.4	35.7	34.6
UF	51.5	45.8	50.9	30.9	26.6	31.9	17.6	27.6	17.2

Source: 1) Sarvekshana, September 1990: Results of the Fourth Quinquennial Survey on Employment ND Unemployment (all-India), NSS 43rd Round, July 1987- June 1998. For Kerala, Sarvekshana, Special Issue, January 1992.

2) Sarvekshana, July-September 1996, Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94(50th Round), National Sample Survey Organisation.

3)1999-00, Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 1999-00, Report No. 458 (55/10/2).

Employment by status (Table 5) shows that during the period 1987-1999 the share of women in self- employment has fallen in rural areas, while in the urban areas though their share in employment has declined in 1993-94 it recorded an increase in1999-2000 at the national level. While 53 per cent of the rural females and 51 per cent of the urban females were categorized as self- employed, the corresponding percentage for the rural males was 38 and that of urban males 37 In Kerala. In the case of regular employment, female employment in the urban areas has shown only a marginal increase, where as in the rural areas, their share had risen significantly (from 9.4 in 1987-88 to 15.0 per cent in 1999-00).Higher levels of literacy in Kerala have certainly enabled women to secure a higher share of regular

employment. This is also reflected in the organized sector employment in Kerala as compared to other states in India(Eapen,2004).

Female employment in Organised Sector

The workers in the organized sector are those who are regularly employed and are eligible for getting wages and non- wage benefits as per the labour laws. The organized sector comprises of all categories of public establishments as well as private establishments employing 10 or more persons.

Table 6. Employment of Women in the Organised Sector in Kerala, 1993-2003

Year	Women employment in public sector (%)	Women employment in private sector (%)	Total women in public & private sector (in lakhs)	Total workers(in lakh)	Percentage of women employment to total employment
1993	31.29	43.76	4.38	11.85	36.96
1994	31.47	44.44	4.48	11.98	37.39
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.74	n/a
1996	29.54	46.38	4.41	11.79	37.40
1997	29.73	46.62	4.37	11.63	37.58
1998	29.78	47.62	4.64	12.16	38.16
1999	29.45	43.79	4.43	12.10	36.61
2000	n/a	n/a	4.78	12.52	38.18
2001	30.01	49.00	4.86	12.42	39.13
2002	30.33	49.01	4.76	12.14	39.21
2003	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.12	n/a

Source: 1)Statistics for Planning, 2001.

2) Economic Review, 2003.

The share of female workers in the organized sector in Kerala is also low as compared to their male counterparts. But the position of women in Kerala (40 per cent) is better than their counterparts at the national level (19 per cent). In the private sector, the proportion of female workers in Kerala form 50 per cent where as it is below 25 per cent in India. Table 6 shows that though the share of women's employment in the organized sector is on the rise, their share is still less than that of men. The improvement in the proportion of women employment in the organized sector is predominantly in the private sector and this trend was seen particularly during the post liberalization period. During the post-reform period, private sector has the pace over that of public sector in respect of growth rate of employment. The deceleration in employment growth in public sector enterprises in the post-reform period was, however, more than offset by a sharp increase in employment in the private sector enterprises, which led to acceleration in employment growth in organized sector. In spite of this, we cannot find a marked increase in their level of employment, commensurate with their high level of literacy, skill development and high sex ratio. A significant proportion of women in the organized sector are located at the lower end of the worker hierarchy. Majority of the female workers are engaged in activities connected with agriculture, household industry and in the unorganized segment of other industries and services without employment or income security. For instance, only five public sector undertakings are managed by women out of a total of 112 public sector undertakings functioning in the state.

Trends in Unemployment

Structural reforms and the search for greater competitiveness are found to produce weak employment growth in the expanding sectors, as well as shedding of workers in the traditional industries. This low employment intensity of output growth has resulted in the swelling up of the category of unemployed. (Neetha, 2009).

The unemployment of a vast section of the active labour force has become a grave socio-economic problem during the last few decades. Kerala accounts for only three per cent

of India's population, but its share of India's unemployed is as high as 16 per cent. The study by Eapen (2004) has shown that the low female work participation rates in Kerala indicate the existence of large proportion of unemployed women in the labour force. The estimates by National Sample Survey Organisation for Kerala confirm this fact. A sex -wise distribution shows that the rural unemployment rate for females is 26 per cent while it is only 20 per cent for males based on current daily status definition of unemployment (NSSO, 2001). The incidence of unemployment was found to be higher among women both in rural and urban areas. Urban unemployment rate for females is as high as 28 per cent as against 15.5 for males.

Table 7. Unemployment Rates in 1999-2000: Kerala and All India (%)

	<u>Kerala</u>		<u>All India</u>	
	Usual principal status	Current daily status	Usual principal status	Current daily status
Rural				
Male	7.6	20.0	2.1	7.2
Female	19.7	26.1	1.5	7.0
Person	10.9	21.7	1.9	7.1
Urban				
Male	6.9	15.5	4.8	7.3
Female	26.4	28.2	7.1	9.4
Person	12.5	19.1	5.2	7.7

Source: National Sample Survey Organisation, 2001.

Unemployment among the educated is also a serious matter of concern. The percentage of educated persons among the unemployed in Kerala is also higher than at all - India. If we analyze the unemployment situation in Kerala we could find that this is true. It is evident from the NSSO data that one-fourth of the educated labour force in rural areas and more than one- fifth of the educated labour force in urban areas is unemployed based on usual principal status. In Kerala, female educated unemployment in urban areas is 34.2 per cent as compared to 36.7 per cent in rural areas in 1999-2000. As opposed to this the female educated unemployment in the rural and urban areas of India is 14.3 per cent and 14.6 per cent respectively during the same period.

Table 8. Educated Unemployment Rates in Kerala and India, 1993-94 to 1999-2000 (in %)

Category of Workers	Kerala		India	
	50 th round (1993-94)	55 th round (1999-2000)	50 th round (1993-94)	55 th round (1999-2000)
<i>Usual principal and</i>				
<i>Subsidiary status (UPSS)</i>				
Rural male	15.6	11.2	6.5	5.6
Rural female	32.3	36.7	15.0	14.6
Urban male	11.2	7.4	6.0	6.2
Urban female	34.9	34.2	18.2	14.3
<i>Usual principal</i>				
<i>Status (UPS)</i>				
Rural male	18.5	15.0	8.8	6.8
Rural female	49.6	49.1	24.9	20.4
Urban male	12.6	9.9	6.9	6.6
Urban female	40.6	41.9	20.6	16.3

Source: NSSO (1996), 2001.

EDUCATION IN KERALA

Kerala's achievements in the field of social development and high quality of living are the outcome of the educational progress the state has made over several decades. Even before the attainment of the country's Independence, the state of Kerala had a good record in the field of education (Leela Gulati and Ramalingam, 1997). This progress has been attained by the pioneering endeavour of the Christian missionaries, social reformers, the benevolent rulers of the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin region and the social intermediation brought about by enlightened public action. 'Liberation through education' was the motto of Sree Narayana Guru, the great seer and social philosopher of Kerala who encouraged the establishment of schools in Kerala for the hitherto untouchables.

If we go through the literacy rates in Kerala it becomes clear that these rates have improved for both men and women over the years, and that a reasonable level of gender parity now prevails (Table 9). But literacy rates among Indians, male or female are far below those in the developed countries as well as countries like Vietnam, Philippines or Thailand with over 90 per cent literacy for both sexes.

Table 9. Literacy Rates in India and Kerala 1961-2001

Year	INDIA (%)		KERALA (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961	34.44	12.95	54.97	38.90
1971	39.45	18.68	66.62	54.31
1981	46.62	24.73	87.74	75.65
1991	64.13	39.29	93.62	86.17
2001	75.85	54.16	94.20	87.86

Source: Economic Review, 1994 and 2004.

Table 10 gives the trends in gross enrolment ratios at different stages of education (primary to high school classes). Clearly, at all stages of school education, the gross enrolment rates for girls have improved substantially over the years. The girl students constitute 49.23 per cent of total student enrolment in schools. The percentage of girl students at lower primary, upper primary and high school stage stood at 49.63 per cent, 48.82 per cent and 49.16 per cent respectively during 2003-04.

Table 10. Sex-wise Distribution of Enrolment in schools In Kerala 1971-72 to 2003-2004

Year	Lower Primary		Upper Primary		High School		Total	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1971-72	52.3	47.7	53.6	46.4	52.1	47.9	52.6	47.4
1981-82	51.6	48.4	52.4	47.6	51.3	48.7	51.8	48.2
1991-92	51.3	48.7	51.4	48.6	50.0	50.0	51.0	49.0
2001-02	50.7	49.3	51.8	48.2	50.4	49.6	51.0	49.0
2003-04	50.4	49.6	51.7	48.3	50.7	49.3	50.9	49.1

Source: Directorate of Public Instruction, Trivandrum.

In Kerala, like anywhere else in India, the high achievers from schools almost invariably enroll for courses in higher education sector including professional courses. Table 11 indicates the sex-wise enrollment of students in Kerala during the years 2006 and 2007. It is evident from the table that girl students outweigh boys with regard to higher education. Table 11 makes it clear that 78.20 per cent have enrolled for post Graduate courses while the corresponding percentage at the graduation level forms.

Table 11. Enrolment of Students in Arts and Science Colleges in Kerala, 2006-2007

Name of Course	2006				2007			
	Boys	Girls	Total	Girls' %	Boys	Girls	Total	Girls' %
B.A.	22367	45169	67536	66.88	21286	42958	64244	66.87
B.Sc	19788	44382	64170	69.16	18811	44210	63021	70.45

B. Com	11338	12985	24325	53.38	11513	13005	24518	53.04
Sub Total	53493	102536	156029	65.72	51610	100173	151783	65.99
M.A.	2130	6330	8460	74.82	1514	6001	7515	79.85
M.Sc	2414	8249	10663	77.36	2079	7855	9934	79.07
M.Com	1216	2409	3625	66.46	940	2401	3341	71.86
Sub Total	5760	16988	22748	74.68	4533	16257	20790	78.20
Total	59253	119524	178777	66.86	56143	116430	172573	67.47

Source: Economic Review, 2007.

The literacy levels by themselves do not accurately reveal the educational attainment of population. What is needed is the availability of good, quality education to all girls. But, that is available to a small percentage of girls as is evident from the Table 12.

Table 12. Gender-wise Distribution of Students in CBSE and ICSE Schools in Kerala-2001-02

Enrolment of Students	Total	Boys	Girls	Boy's (%)	Girl's (%)
CBSE Schools	224585	125406	99179	55.8	44.2
ICSE Schools	46087	26927	19160	58.4	41.6
Kendriya Vidyalaya	31575	17104	14471	54.2	45.8
Navodaya Vidyalaya	5962	3477	2483	58.4	41.6

Source: Economic Review, 2004.

The enrolment rate of girls in the higher secondary and vocational higher secondary schools surpasses the rate of boys and it is greater than 53 per cent in 2004. But the proportion of girls enrolled in the Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya, CBSE and ICSE Schools is below 45 per cent.

Quite contrary to this, women are far ahead of men in graduate and post-graduate education in the arts and science courses. But they lag behind men in professional and technical courses like engineering, medicine, veterinary science etc. The percentage of students enrolled in engineering colleges is very low, i.e., 30 per cent (Economic Review, 2001). But the situation has improved much. The Universities in Kerala have shifted their

emphasis from conventional courses to professional and technical job oriented courses when they grant sanction to start new courses.

Table 13. Course-wise Enrolment of Students in Engineering Courses, 2002-03

Courses	Total	Boys	Girls	Percentage of girls
Civil Engineering	2408	1250	1158	48.10
Chemical Engineering	540	324	216	40.00
Computer Science and Engineering	6400	3520	2880	45.00
Information Technology	2700	1620	1080	40.00
Electronics and Communication Engg	6625	4625	2000	30.20
Electrical Engineering	3600	1980	1620	45.00
Polymer Engineering	240	120	120	50.00
Production cum plant Engineering	240	192	48	20.00
Applied Electronics and Instrumentation	720	648	72	10.00
Electronics and Instrumentation	495	250	245	57.10
Architecture	320	165	155	48.43
Bio Medical Engineering	320	132	188	58.70
Industrial Engineering	120	90	30	25.00

Instrumentation and Control Engineering	240	195	45	18.75
Mechanical Engineering	3964	3924	40	1.00
Mechanical Engineering(Production)	240	228	12	5.00
Total	29172	19263	9909	33.96

Source: Directorate of Technical Education, Trivandrum.

Table 13 furnishes details about the course-wise enrolment of girls. While the enrolment of girls in certain specializations of engineering exceed 50 per cent (Bio-medical and electronics and instrumentation), in all other courses their percentage is very low and it is even less than five per cent. The number of girl students in Industrial Training Institutes and Technical High Schools is also low. But in other courses like teachers training, para-medical courses etc women are overwhelmingly represented. The trade wise analysis shows that there is a strong gender bias with girls opting for courses like stenography, dressmaking, secretarial practice, tailoring and beautician courses. A critical look at the pattern of education pursue after schooling , through a gender lens, reveals that the courses that have a larger intake of girls are those that lead to suitable professions for women from the point of view of their familial responsibilities (Eapen and Kodoth, 2004). The predominance of women in such courses confirms the fact that higher education is seen as a means to further 'marriageability' of girls, by enabling them to make better wives and mothers and a potential contributors to the economic well- being of the family (Eapen and Kodoth 2004).

REASONS FOR THE DECLINING WORK PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN KERALA

The purpose of education is not merely the attainment of knowledge. It should enable people to secure gainful employment opportunities. Though literacy has been increasing at a much rapid pace in Kerala as compared to the rest of the country, it has not translated in to suitable job opportunities. Female educated unemployment is an acute problem in Kerala especially among those with secondary school level education. The percentage of female

jobseekers accounted to 58 during the year 2007. Some of the reasons are associated with the education system itself while others are related with the society. At low levels of literacy and education, women may be engaged in work to a substantial extent, but without education, they would not be able to obtain employment characterized by independent income earning opportunity, stability and job security and upward mobility. Opportunities for employment would, no doubt, depend on the pace and pattern of economic growth and development, but lack of education and requisite skills may still prevent women from taking advantage of them (Papola, 1993).

The root cause of the low work participation of women can be seen in the gender discrimination which has been in existence for centuries. Women of all castes, and communities, rich or poor, educated or uneducated are the victims of this discrimination. The Kerala women are not an exception to this evil. Even though we boast of high human development, women empowerment etc, these are only myths and not a reality. There is a general belief among parents that girls are destined to become housewives and mothers. They are quite unwilling to give quality education to their daughters. This is evident from the low enrolment of girls in CBSE and ICSE schools and engineering and medicine courses. The parents think that their foremost responsibility towards a girl child is her marriage, which is a costly affair due to the mounting dowry rates. They are thus not very particular about providing good education to their daughters. This type of attitude is seen even among the rich and educated parents. Their belief is that investing in a girl's education is a waste and hence they will not make the least effort to secure admission for their daughters/ sisters in those institutions where quality education is imparted. Rather, they are interested in accumulating the money needed for the marriage. The attitude of people towards girls' education is that giving them education is just like watering a plant in their neighbour's compound. They ignore the very concept of Sree Narayana Guru, "Liberation through Education" (Jameela, 2006). Only good, quality education can equip the women with necessary skills for finding out a job. As women/girls are deprived of such education naturally their work participation rate is likely to decline.

The reluctance of the parents to send their daughters to schools and colleges situated far away from their homes may be another reason for the lower enrolment of the girls in educational institutions imparting quality education/professional education. The main reason for this reluctance lies in the security concerns as Kerala is a state notorious for violence against women. There has been a persistent increase in the number of crimes against women as it rose to 7681 in 2004 as against 1867 in 1991. God's own country and devil's own people living here, makes the life of women difficult. This is supported by Shashi Tharoor (2007) "But I have seen girls in Madurai Kamaraj University in Tamil Nadu walk fearlessly and safely to hostels late at night after completing their work in libraries and laboratories. Yet I cannot expect (to see) a girl after six or seven on the campus of the university where I work. I have seen many Malayali women walk with confidence in Bangalore, Mumbai, and New Delhi. But when they come to Calicut or Trichur, (places in Kerala) they become timid Kalyanikuttys," he concludes. Despite all their claims to literacy and empowerment, they are not safe in their home state. "The reluctance on the part of the parents proves to be detrimental to the well-being of girls. This will result in the denial of the women's right to a good education which may make her future a dismal one. This has resulted in the poor representation of Kerala women in premier services like IAS, IPS, IFS etc though there may be one Nirupama Rao or Lalithambika. Here is another example where work participation falls due to safety reasons. Sneha, a post graduate in Mathematics got appointment as statistical investigator in the central government service. She was posted in a remote village in Bangalore. She went there and joined duty but after two days her parents asked her to resign from service as they could not accompany her always while she was on duty. Till now, she has not got any other job.

Training and skill formation is also of utmost significance in expanding the base of women's employment in a rapidly growing and structurally changing economy like Kerala. But unfortunately, the higher education system in Kerala is dominated by Arts and Science Colleges which provide only generalized education. The products of these institutions do not possess the skills and knowledge needed by the fast changing modern society. In the

modern world, the two things which are counted most by the employers in the job market are communicative skills and computer skills. Along with this, the smartness, confidence level, innovative spirit, quick and rational responses etc are also taken into account during the time of selection. But the current education system in Kerala does not equip the students with such skill. A need based education is very relevant. Absence of such education may affect the employment chances of both the sexes, but more particularly the chances of the females. Until and unless the system of education at the higher education level is altered in accordance with the requirements of the sectors like industry and service, the females cannot entertain any hope of getting jobs. Hence, the work participation of the females declined. This is because of the higher enrollment of the girls in the Arts and Science courses as is evident from the Table - 11. Add on courses (career development courses) should be included in the curriculum and be made compulsory.

Lack of interest on the part of girls to secure jobs after their studies is yet another reason for the low work participation rate. Most of the girl students coming to the colleges do not have any genuine interest for securing a job after their studies. As a teacher I personally understand that whenever I ask the question what you would like to become only a handful of students express their future plans. Others remain mute. They do not take education seriously, neglecting or ignoring the fact that education can facilitate the way to employment. They think that after their marriage, husbands will take care of them.

The cost of education can be considered as an important factor responsible for the preponderance of girls in certain type of courses. Education has become a costly affair in these days. The fee structure of the professional courses like medicine and engineering is relatively much higher than that of the arts and science courses. The emergence of the self financing institutions in the field of professional education has made the situation all the more grave. In these circumstances parents prefer to secure admission for their sons in the professional colleges while they send their daughters to arts and science colleges. This is based on the belief that boys are an asset/insurance who protect them in old age) where as

girls are a burden. The result is that girls are deprived of job oriented education leading to low work participation rates.

CONCLUSION

The paper analysed three important aspects, i.e., trends in work participation rates, nature of education in Kerala in general and also the reasons responsible for the low work participation of females. The study has drawn on secondary data for explaining these aspects. It reached the conclusion that work participation of females are declining even though female education in the state is progressing .Faulty education system in the state of Kerala, predominance of arts and science colleges with conventional courses, huge fees charged in the self- financing colleges, lack of professional colleges in the government sector, gender discrimination etc are some of the factors identified leading to low work participation of women. The study stresses the inclusion of add on courses in the higher education system so as to enhance the capabilities of females to secure gainful employment.

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