

# Role of Women in the Development Path of Kerala

Georgi Mathew Varughese

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Mar Thoma College, Tiruvalla, Kerala, India

## OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
ECO-2024-12047930

Volume: 12

Issue: 4

Month: September

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2319-961X

E-ISSN: 2582-0192

Received: 19.07.2024

Accepted: 25.08.2024

Published: 01.09.2024

Citation:  
Varughese, Georgi Mathew. "Role of Women in the Development Path of Kerala." *Shanlax International Journal of Economics*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2024, pp. 5-10.

DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.34293/economics.v12i4.7930>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

## Abstract

*Kerala, a state in southwestern India, has achieved remarkable social and economic development, surpassing many other Indian states. A significant contributor to this success is the empowered role of women in Kerala's society. This paper examines the crucial contributions of women to Kerala's development path, highlighting their impact on education, healthcare, economy, and social reform. With a high literacy rate and active participation in the workforce, women have driven positive change and played a vital role in shaping the state's development trajectory. The paper explores the historical and cultural context that has enabled women's empowerment in Kerala, discussing the influence of matrilineal traditions, education initiatives, and social movements. By analyzing the experiences and achievements of women in Kerala, this research demonstrates the transformative power of gender equality and women's empowerment in achieving sustainable development and social progress.*

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Kerala, Development, Education, Social Reform, Healthcare, Economy, Gender Equality

## Introduction

In addition, Kerala has a higher percentage of female employers than other states 2% while other states only have 0.6%. It is also important to highlight that, in contrast to other states, Kerala had a negligible growth in the number of women performing unpaid home labour in the past year (between 2018-19 and 2019-20). However, the proportion of women in salaried employment has stayed constant, suggesting that creating 'good' positions for women is stagnating. As a result of this realization, the third of the eight Millennium Development Goals is gender equality and female empowerment. Gender equality and women's empowerment were founded on this finding. Kerala does not require a gender and development strategy because of the State of human development, which is distinct and favourable. Gender equality must replace women's empowerment as the primary goal of the plan's development, and democracy must be employed throughout. In formulating this plan, it is imperative to acknowledge that males must play a significant and knowledgeable role if gender equality in Kerala is to advance.

The real meaning of burning up negative psychic imprints is crucial to understand. It is essential to realize that it grants decision-making authority, not vice versa. Only when elections are rejected before the true meaning is understood can someone be empowered. There are various ways to describe empowerment, but in the context of women's empowerment, inclusion and acceptance of those (women) who are not involved in decision-making are key components. Women's empowerment is essential to a nation's overall development. The process through which people gain control over their own lives, as well as the lives of others, is known as empowerment. When individuals in a community have unrestricted access to possibilities, like education, they are empowered. People in communities are empowered when they have unrestricted access to options like education, work, and lifestyle.

A sense of strength arises from believing you are worthy of making your own choices. Educating women, promoting knowledge, providing training in illiteracy and self-defence, and boosting their standards via education is every part of empowerment.

This constrained strategy ignores the ability that the patriarchal structures in place will prevent women from receiving the same treatment as males. Therefore, to reach economic success, the social stigma attached to women's participation needs to be altered. According to (Dufflo), economic development and women's empowerment are interdependent and cannot be pursued independently.

In this instance, the Women in Development discourse acknowledges the drawbacks of neo-classical ideology but also assumes them. After a certain age, women will have more excellent personal development opportunities, and institutional barriers will become less potent. This study illustrates that the government will naturally put empowerment mechanisms in place once the impediments are removed. It advocates an alternative perspective on 'gender and development' in yet another thorough conversation. The way that GAD approached traditional measures of education and employment was understood. Still, political power will only cause more issues and disruptions and does not allow women to be empowered. This suggested that to quantify gender inequality, emphasis should be paid to non-traditional aspects of the process and indicators that work in tandem with traditional ones (Scaria). Relationships could be one of these non-traditional indications.

### The Situation of Kerala

An enormous number of goddesses are revered in a nation like India. Regretfully, women are still viewed as less valuable than men despite post-independence reforms - the marginalized and exploited State in their oppression (Sreekumar). The primary drawback of treating women like goddesses is that the comparison paints a picture of a powerful lady prepared to battle evil. But that's not how this makes sense. It helps regular ladies to establish a mark of identity. It is not acceptable to publish the falsehood that women are superwomen. And then gives it a slight push. Most ladies are also hidden in

this region. It also ignores that even the goddesses were part of a community under their authority. Their ability to protect is restricted to instances of strong male dominance.

In Kerala, 21% of working-age women had jobs in 2018–19. Remarkably, of these working women, almost half had regular paying jobs, almost twice as high as the percentage in the rest of India .In Kerala, however, this barely makes up 8 percent of the workforce; in the rest of the country, unpaid household work employs most women. This suggests that the State has been able to provide its female workforce with higher-quality employment opportunities.

### Patterns of Working Women in Kerala and Rest of India

	2018-19 to 2019-20			
	Rest of India	Kerala	Rest of India	Kerala
Own Account Worker	21.3	19.2	20.8	20.0
Employer	0.6	2.1	0.5	2.5
Unpaid Family Worker	28.6	8.4	32.4	10.4
Regular Salaried	23.6	49.9	21.8	49.5
Casual Wage Worker (Public Works)	1.7	6.7	1.1	6.9
Casual Wage Worker (Other)	24.2	13.8	23.4	10.8

Source: PLFS 2018-19 & 2019-20

### Distribution of Working Age Women (Aged 15 and above) by Education Level, Kerala and Rest of India (2019-20)

	Rest of India	Kerala
Not Literate	33	8
Secondary & below	46	58
Higher Secondary	10	14
Diploma/Graduate and above	11	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: PLFS 2019-20

As for women employers, Kerala has a very high percentage (2%) of them, whereas other states only

have 0.6%. It is also important to highlight that, in contrast to other states, Kerala had a negligible growth in the number of women performing unpaid home labour in the past year (between 2018-19 and 2019-20). However, the proportion of women employed on a salaried basis has been constant, suggesting a stall in creating ‘good’ positions for women.

Kerala’s female working age population is unique when compared to the rest of India. On an average, women in Kerala are more educated. A look at work participation by educational-levels reveals that the likelihood of getting a job is higher if the level of education is higher. In 2019-20, as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), only 8 percent of Kerala’s working age women were illiterate compared to 33 percent in the rest of the country. On the other end of the educational spectrum, nearly a quarter of working age women in Kerala had education above higher secondary level while in the rest of the country, the share of women with such education was only 11 per cent.

If we look at women who are highly educated and self-employed, education sector remains a primary employer. Notably for women with higher secondary education, working in agriculture and garment manufacturing are important sectors. For women with the highest level of education, self-employment in the food industry accounts for 18% of such self-employed.

**Major Industry of Activity for Self-Employed, by Education Level of Women, Kerala**

Higher Secondary	Graduate/ Diploma	Post-Graduate and above
Education (54%) Apparel (20%)	Manufacture of Wearing	Education (43%)
Agriculture (15%)	Retail Trade (16%)	Legal and Accounting (20%)
Manufacture of Wearing Apparel (15%)	Education (12%)	Manufacture of Food (18%)
Insurance Services (5%)	Financial Services (5%)	

Given the above patterns of concentration and segregation, even within the knowledge economy, there are limits on how far women progress in

their career whether as salaried workers or as entrepreneurs. It is important therefore to chart out and facilitate a clear career path for women in these industries.

In India, gender inequality is pervasive. Despite the State’s numerous initiatives, the state fares worse on traditional metrics. There is a state that is an exception, but the remainder of the nation experiences curved gender inequality. Compared to the 2011 All India Census, the advantageous sex ratio is 1084; Kerala is an anomaly to the overall pattern of women’s advancement. Likewise, Kerala women score higher than their counterparts in other regions of the country regarding life expectancy, literacy, and average age at marriage. Unfortunately, most Indian states have set aside land for Kerala women due to favourable historical circumstances (Arunachalam). Perhaps it cleared the path for Kerala’s most tremendous success in the development of women. Due to historical favouritism, Keralan women have been granted land by the majority of Indian states, which is unfortunate. Perhaps it cleared the path for Kerala to attain its most tremendous success in the development of women. An improvement in human development generally is the outcome. Kerala has 92% of its female population literate, while the national average is only 65%, according to the 2011 Economic Survey. The life expectancy of women in Kerala is 76.3 years, while it is 64.2 years for women nationwide, according to the most recent secondary source that is accessible.

Kerala is referred to as God’s Own Country and is the 13th largest economy in India. It is accurate to refer to Kerala’s development story and revolution as the ‘development model of Kerala’. This approach contains a great deal of paradox because social indicators have advanced so much, and the State’s economic growth has been astounding. It is intriguing since this type of unified growth is unique (Mukhopadhyay and Sudarshan).

**Complex Model of Development**

Kerala was portrayed as a complex country by writers of the 1950s because India was the cradle of Indian communism, similar to China’s Yanan. For almost a generation, this belief was reinforced by the election of Kerala’s first Communist government,

the Government of 1957 (Kabeer). It wasn't until the 1970s that the emphasis shifted from Marxist doctrine to remarkable yet beautiful social metrics, such as lower birth and infant mortality rates, more literacy, a higher ratio of women to men, and an average life expectancy. In Kerala, these alterations are evident. Women's contribution to the State's development is primarily responsible for this.

Women's roles vary in strength depending on where in the State they are played. Still, generally speaking, laws and expected changes in land relations, family and blood links, and the social and economic framework have strengthened the position of women. As a bonus, it assisted in dismantling the strict caste structure that accompanied it. This is mainly because Kerala's educational system has grown. Prominent British Empire provinces included Travancore and Kochi, thanks to the initiative of their rulers. Even as early as 1817, leaders such as Travancore's governing queen, Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai, made it plain that the State should provide education for everyone by paying for it.

### **Ensure the Development of Matrilineal Systems**

A matrilineal system of property inheritance in some top levels of society could also contribute to Kerala's prosperity (Sen). The growth model of Kerala society's women requires an awareness of their location. Even though the matrilineal model is primarily responsible for establishing the State, it is believed to have decreased during the twentieth century, completely disappearing in 1976. Women's property shares, rather than dowries, are dropping, indicating the systemic collapse that started in patriarchal societies (Chacko). In this sense, comprehending the function of the system's matrix from its inception to its collapse becomes crucial.

Before delving into more detail, it is imperative to distinguish between marriage and marital status. A 'matriarchy' is a social structure in which power is distributed. Even though matrilineal descent is an anthropological word for an aspect of inheritance in the form of property (often found in Africa), this rarely occurs in the hands of women. Race is the means of transmission of the female (Ampofo and Boateng). Accurately identifying the woman's race is essential since property is not passed from one

woman to another; instead, it is transferred to a male relative of the woman.

For instance, the son-in-law owns the mother's brother, but not in any way to women. Matrilineal societies' translations are frequently interpreted negatively in favour of female Emancipation. These societies have greater property rights and a misperception of women. Men, typically siblings or maternal uncles, are primarily responsible for land utilization in this archaic society. However, in related decisions, it was crucial to divide or transfer land ownership with the women's consent (Agarwal). We are headed toward trouble when powerful men and women claim that a community's women are strong because society is matrilineal. This enables decision-makers to disregard the need for further consideration and conclude that women in matrilineal society already have the right to own land. The conflict between the Cholas and Cheras appears to have contributed to the development of Kerala's matrilineal system in about the eleventh century AD.

Next, it remains steadfast in Upper caste Nair. The matrilineal system had the significant benefit of allowing women and girls to roam freely throughout society. Girls were urged to enrol in neighbourhood schools, which helped India become the leader in Malabar female literacy, even in the most underdeveloped areas. With this knowledge, women were better equipped to obtain paid employment in both the previous colonial system and the contemporary development paradigm (Barroso and Jacobson). As a result, a technique for instructing girls was developed, and the need for female instructors and bicycles persisted. Kerala had 94% female teachers and 58% male teachers in the mid-1980s. Girls in elementary school were predicted to go to school.

The idea that women may be regarded as wage workers was made possible by the Matrilineal. Women were employed in fields other than schooling. In the 1930s, women started to work as doctors and nurses and became midwives. Matrilineal societies provided hospitals and a significant number of women. It applied to families in various localities and around the State and began as training for Nair families. The fact that Kerala women have been working for

pay recently has contributed to an ageing population and a declining birth rate. Keralan women who work in 'white collar' jobs and receive salaries are uncommon in modern India. Among Kerala's 185,000 teachers in 2000, women comprised 68% of the workforce. According to the 1991 census, 24% of Kerala's working women were employed in 'other services', which included paid positions. Kerala has three times the rate of employed women compared to any other state in India, which is only 8% of the same age. The influence of the matrilineal system was so significant that political ideology continued to hold women even after it collapsed, and the Kerala model of developed development produced the pioneers.

### Conclusion

This piece contends that comprehension of the Keralan Matrilineal System's employment-generating processes is crucial. According to surveys, the nation could abandon Kerala's popular tendencies for a long time. Kerala's employment situation differs significantly from that of other central states in India, as the pattern data shows. In general, the tendency toward employment in significant states like India is continuing to decline, and a graduate there is In the partnership tables, the partnership is shown. In Kerala, over 40% of men work with women in the service industry. Compared to other central states in India, Kerala has a high proportion of working women in the service sector. Put another way, according to the 2001 Census, women make up the majority of workers in Kerala's service industry. The 68th Round of the NSSO 2011–12, however, indicates that there has been an increase in the gender disparity in the State. In Kerala, the percentage of women employed is 40.3% of the total population (per 100 individuals). In terms of percentages, it is 24.8% for women and 57.8% for men.

The employment distribution of women by region in Kerala. It demonstrates how many more women work in the agricultural industry than males. Although the relative proportions of the industry are not significantly different, the percentage of men involved in the service sector is higher than that of women. This indicates a division in the industry due to the many women

working in traditionally low-productivity sectors such as handloom, cashew, chassis, and coir. In conclusion, even though it is rarely acknowledged, it can be claimed that Kerala's growth as a state, particularly the well-known Kerala development model, has significantly impacted women. There has been a noticeable decrease in women's involvement in the State. However, there have been concerns recently regarding the actual effects of the matrilineal system on households. Measures of women's power in the State and the extent to which that power is exercised include policies and indicators. Moving on with the institutional structure that guarantees that only women are empowered is necessary, even though the system cannot be disregarded entirely. It keeps expanding in the absence of the matrilineal system.

### References

- Agarwal, Bina. "Gender and Command Over Property: A Critical Gap in Economic Analysis and Policy in South Asia." *World Development*, vol. 22, no. 10, 1994.
- Ampofo, Akosua Adomako, and John Boateng. *Understanding Masculinities, Empowering Women: What have Boys in Ghana got to do with it?.* *Global Empowerment of Women*, Routledge, 2007.
- Arunachalam, Jaya. "Towards Sustainable Development: Empowerment of Poor Women." *World Conference on Gender and Equality: Poverty, Development and Collective Survival*, 1988.
- Azad, Nandini. "Empowering Women Workers: The WWF Experiment in Indian Cities." *Working Women's Forum*, 1986.
- Balsara, Shiraz. "The Panchayati Raj and the Rhetorics of Women's Empowerment: The Dilemma before "Non-Party" Feminist Groups." *Women, Empowerment, and Political Participation*, Research Centre for Women's Studies, 1997, pp. 143-47.
- Barroso, C., and Jodi L. Jacobson. "Population Policy and Women's Empowerment: Challenges and Opportunities." *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo*, Oxford University Press. 2000.



- Bjorling, Bam. *Backward towards the Future: A Post-Beijing Analysis of Three Decades with Women's Empowerment*. Foundation for Women's Forum, 1996.
- Chacko, Elizabeth. "Marriage, Development, and the Status of Women in Kerala, India." *Gender and Development*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2003, pp. 52-59.
- Duflo, Esther. "Women Empowerment and Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2012.
- Kabeer, Naila. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal." *Gender and Development*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2005, pp. 13-24.
- Mukhopadhyay, Swapna, and Ratna M. Sudarshan. *Tracking Gender Equity under Economic Reforms*. International Development Research Centre, 2003.
- Scaria, Suma. "A Dictated Space? Women and their Well-Being in a Kerala Village." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2014, pp. 421-49.
- Sen, Amartya. "Women's Survival as a Development Problem." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1989, pp. 14-29.
- Sreekumar, B. "Women in Agriculture: An Evaluation of the Central Scheme in Palakkad District (Kerala)." *Discussion Paper No. 30*, 2001.
- State Planning Board. *Economic Review*. Government of Kerala, 2017.
- State Planning Board. *Economic Review*. Government of Kerala, 2019.

#### Author Details

**Georgi Mathew Varughese**, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Mar Thoma College, Tiruvalla, Kerala, India, *Email ID*: [lijifridhu@gmail.com](mailto:lijifridhu@gmail.com)