



## Problems and Prospects of Elected Women Representatives at Grass Root Level in Kerala with Special Reference to Palakkad District

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**ABSTRACT:** Kerala is a state that is incomparable with many other states in India in matters of literacy, employment, social security, health, and many other social welfare initiatives. Social Security is the sum of all government regulations and provisions that aim at enhancing the people's living conditions, including legislation/acts/laws, regulation, and planning in the fields of old age, wage, unemployment, social exclusion, sickness, and health care, and income security measures such as food security, employment, education and health, housing, social insurance, and social assistance. Financial assistance provided by the Government towards various pension schemes exhibits its concern for the privileged group in society. Various social welfare pension Schemes offered by Govt of Kerala include 1) Agriculture Labour Pension, 2) Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension, 3) Indira Gandhi Nation Disabled Pension Scheme for Physically & Mentally Challenged Persons, 4) Pension to Unmarried Women above 50 Years and 5) Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme. Social security protects people living in economic and social distress. It can "protect" people against a fall in living standards and living conditions through ill-health, unemployment, and accidents, and also "promote" enhanced living conditions, helping the poor to overcome persistent deprivations. There has been a growing demand that the approach to social security programmers and schemes should progressively shift to a rights-based framework and should not be viewed merely from a welfare prism. Welfare scheme aims to support the vulnerable section of society. The present study aims to 1) understand various social welfare schemes adopted by Govt of Kerala, and 2) Assess the benefits and Woes of Widows who avails Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension. The present study is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources and suitable statistical tools will be used to analyse the collected data. The study reveals that even though it is one of the flagship initiatives of the Government of Kerala, it has many flaws. A better understanding of the woes of pension beneficiaries will help in better implementation of the project.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Welfare Pension, Widow Pension, Social Security, Fund Utilization, Woes

### 1. INTRODUCTION

“Marginalization” and “empowerment” has always stood as a major topic in research in a developing country like India. While developed countries demonstrated vast economic growth, the developed societies were receiving unequal shares as rewards of success. Women have risen to

the exact exemplification of the minimized gatherings in a nation like India. Empowerment has across the broad utilization and is the key center of improvement programmes. Women empowerment can be seen as a continuum of several interrelated components. These include creating awareness about the women situation, discrimination and rights and opportunities as a step



towards gender equality, capacity building and skill development, participation, greater control and decision making power and action to bring about greater equality between men and women.

Empowerment can be seen in many ways such as social, economic and political. To be socially empowered, the status need to be identified and a positive image and self-confidence need to be created which makes them to develop a critical thinking capacity (Mittal, 2015). Economic empowerment promotes the women to develop their skill and to be equipped as an income generator. Political empowerment among women makes them politically aware and it paves to remove the obstacles and hindrances and promotes political participation.

Local Governance has always been a major concern in India ever since the introduction of Panchayati Raj System. The development efforts in India rarely addressed the issues of equality and the development of the power and the growth at grass root level. The 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendment Acts have been the major steps in the direction of decentralized governance in India. 73rd amendment, an effort to eradicate gender inequality, constituted the Panchayati Raj System of decentralized local self-government in rural India in 1993 and it mandates that at least 33%the seats in every local government council to be reserved for women (Gupta and Mittal, 2015). It was an aid to improve and uplift the marginalized sector. Studies show that the Women PRI's has been significantly increased and their participation too in spite of the resistance they had from the conservative system.

The concept of capacity building has been defined by J Bolger as “abilities, Skills understanding, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviour, motivation, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organization, network/section and broader social system to carry out functions and achieve their development objective over time”. Effective capacity building means learning by doing, access to resources, facilitation and training. Operationally defined, capacity building programme increases the ability of the individual to perform more effectively and efficiently.

It offers, the best opportunity to learn about the skill development among the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats in Kerala. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, passed in 1992, mandates that not less than one third of the total number of seats in village governments (panchayats) and not less than one third of the office of the panchayats should be reserved for women. With this drift from family to society, and endowed with more responsibilities; women create a new environment where she discharges her role effectively

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Sinha, 2004) The article “Women in Local Self Governance” states the view that women by entering into the governance as a result of the amendments of the Indian Constitution have made a difference both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively increasing the percentage of women and qualitatively by making the state sensitive to major issues like poverty, inequality, and gender injustice. (Ahmad, Nilofer, & Parveen, 2008) the study, “Women’s Political Participation and Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Areas of Uttar Pradesh”, makes it clear that the 73rd Amendment is a milestone in the life of women in taking leadership and being the good decision maker. Even the value orientations of the people had a sudden change which ultimately affected the women by a drastic change in the socio-economic life. Traditions, culture, family, and caste play a direct role in directing the life of a rural woman. (D Narayana, 2005) the paper analyses the functioning of the elected representatives at the gram panchayat level in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The survey selected sizable members belonging to SC/ST and other backward castes and over 1/3rd of the panchayat members were women. Women presidents in all the 3 states attend training except women sarpanches in Madhya Pradesh, who are dependent on sons/husbands. The major findings are the lack of capacity-building programs. Training at different locations away from panchayat results in low participation. Controlling the Officials is another serious issue faced by the elected members. A low level of literacy results in over-dependence on secretaries, sons, husbands, fathers, and so on. (Singh, 2004) the study “Empowerment of Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj- A Profile from Haryana” identified that those women were weak in the decision-making process who were from lower economic and socio status except for some women who were from financially sound families. Also, the study points out the need for training programs at the doorstep of women to ensure the participation of women in the training programs. Lack of education, less interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected women, lack of organizing capacity, less participation of women, lack of self-confidence which leads to less leadership qualities, poor fund management, low decision-making skills, etc. affected the women in the Panchayati Raj level. More campaigns and knowledge-sharing sessions need to be launched to change the mind set of all stakeholders. She concluded by remarking on the needed commitment from all the stakeholders to make the Panchayati Raj system more effective and to constitute a strong base for the Indian political system.

### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### 3.1 Statement of the Problem

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has been implemented in the state very effectively. More than 50% of the representatives in Gram panchayats are women in Kerala. Lack of expertise and experience, decision making, less communication skill, less mobility, financial issues, family matters, odd hours, stress, leadership, gender inequality etc. are some of the hurdles faced by the women representatives. This study is to identify the socio-economic and political profile of the elected women representatives and the problem that they faced at the entry level of their reign as a representative

#### 3.2 Objectives of the Study

3.2.1 To examine the socio-economic and political background of elected women representatives.

3.2.2 To examine the problems faced by the elected women representatives at individual level and institutional level.

#### 3.3 Research Methodology

##### 3.3.1 Research Design

The study was both descriptive and analytical in nature.

##### 3.3.2 Sources Of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were used for the purpose of the study.

##### Primary data

The primary data were collected from Elected Women Representatives of gram panchayats at Palakkad District by administering interview schedule.

##### Secondary data

Secondary data were collected from journals, magazines and websites.

##### 3.3.3 Sampling Method

Convenience sampling method is used for data collection.

##### 3.3.4 Sample Size

The study was conducted among sample of 129 Elected Women Representatives of gram panchayats at Palakkad District

##### 3.3.5 Tools used for Analysis

Percentage analysis

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

One of the major social factor which adds great significance to the study is the age of the respondents. 42% of the selected sample belong to an age group of 41-50

which clearly shows the healthy and maturity period of the respondents in making them active in the grass root level since as a women they have come out after major reproductive role as a wife and another reason being the maturity in taking the good decisions starts after attaining a middle age as they are more experienced.

Among the 368 Elected Women Representatives, majority (88.01%) of the respondents are married i.e., being married doesn't hinder the elected women representatives to enter into politics. Being single was yet another issue faced by the woman as they face many threats from the society when they contest because of the ill feeling of the public in accepting them as representative. This is because of the traditional outlook that still existed in this patriarchal society. Hence unmarried and widow/divorced step away from contesting in the elections.

From time immemorial, religion acts as a crucial factor in deciding about the growth of an individual. According to 2011 Census, Hindus constitute the majority in the population, followed by Muslims and then the Christians. Our study also signifies the same following the population pattern. The sample constitute of majority (68.66%) being Hindus

As a major factor, educational qualification was collected from the respondents. 46.05% of the respondents are educated with a High School Degree, 26.16% went for higher secondary, and 22.62% were graduates followed by 3.27% as post graduates, 1.09% with primary education and .82% stood as others. Comparing with the other states in India, Kerala has more female literacy level (Census, 2011) and the respondents' qualification underlines that fact. Education could mould a woman to greater capacity in the grass root level as representatives.

34.88% of the respondents sometimes make them comfortable to attend personal functions of the people amidst of all the societal and panchayat level works.

Family status is a major economic determinant in deciding about the inclusive participation in contesting in the election. The study shows 59.24% of the respondents belong to BPL category. 40.76% of the respondents belong to APL category. Kerala has always been a model state in accepting all irrespective of caste, culture, family status etc. The women from vulnerable and weaker sections get a chance to come to the forefront of the society.

Considering the economic factors, occupation is a major factor for the economic empowerment of a women. Capacity building won't be complete without financial freedom. Hence this variable is very important in the study. Previous studies also reveal the importance of occupation as a tool of capacity building where one may get so much exposure to the outside world majority (50.71%) of the

respondents were not employed prior to election. So the reservation has made them as a candidate and being elected as a representative

Here in this study 85.75 percentage of the respondents have the basic need of having a house to live in their by conforming that the nation takes care of the housing needs in the grass root level.

The family as a whole when contributes financially makes drastic changes in the way in which they live and in turn promote wellbeing of all the members in the family. This the variable , number of earning member in the family is significant in the study for making women relieved from the financial constraints that she faced in the past 65.2% of the respondents have two members in the family who are earning financially this shows the family at the grass root level are progressing economically.

Annual income of the family is another economic factor which makes a family stable and which shows the real status of the family in the grass root level. Though many schemes operates in the panchayat level, majority (73.13%) of the respondents still have their annual income less than 1 lakh. 92% of the respondents contested in the post which was reserved for women.

99.18% of the elected women representatives has regularly casted their vote and this shows that EWR were more responsible citizens before them being elected. Only a minority i.e., 0.82% have failed in impressing their right to vote in the elections held prior to. This minority has come to the field of politics only after a certain time due to the compulsion and hence was not highly bothered about the right to vote.

In all the major studies taken throughout India, the entry of women to politics with a high support from family only could make her survive in the field and to succeed. Hence the status of family member being in politics was considered as an important political variable.83.42% of the EWR had someone from family too in politics. This could be a valid reason in promoting the women into the political scenario. Women are given an entry with the support of strong party members within the family. Kerala is a highly literate state where political impression has rooted traditionally in majority of the families and hence women could be considered as politically empowered right from their childhood. Status of being elected previously

Coming to the political forefront was a major challenge that women faced in India. And it was after such a struggle and strain, that the reservation of 30% for women was made as 73rd Amendment in the Panchayati Raj system. Hence a check to know after being promoted as a EWR, how long stayed in the political field. 93% of the EWR in the 2015 election have participated in the Election process

for the first time. This can point to two conditions i.e., the women after being introduced to politics couldn't continue in the political field for a second term. Other condition is that, the politics in Kerala is so keen in making changes and giving an entry to others especially in promoting the women from family to the society. Hence participation in politics could be a major reason for the growth of women

Majority of the respondents were contesting in the election for the first time

Status of family members with the same political affiliation was a good enquiry in deciding about their participation and survival after being an elected women representative. Majority in bracket 97.87 percentage had family members to belonging to the same political affiliation in which the representative belonged to

Previous political involvement stands as a very strong factor in knowing about their previous connection with the outside world and indeed with politics which would've helped them significantly in better decision-making and communication. Majority (78.83%) of the respondents were well-wisher of the party and hence it is evident that being in the party contributed a lot in the Kerala Political Scenario, to participate in the election process. 63.86% has contributed much more to the politics beyond acting as the well-wisher, they have participated in political party meetings and has been a part of election campaign before being elected as a representative. 59.77% of the Elected Women Representatives have acted as a polling agent or counting agent in the previous election processes before being elected.. 58.97% of the respondents were actively in politics before being elected. 45.26% of the respondents have organised political part meetings before their entry as a representative. 36.96% opined that they didn't have much political involvement rather their involvement level was only voting as a responsible citizen. 15.2% of the respondents were active in student politics too.

Introversion due to lack of communication skill was the major personality constraint identified among the respondents at Palakkad district. Difficulty to take initiative and inability to solve problems were also the other prominent personality constraints identified.

Overburdened with family responsibilities was the prominent family related constraint identified from the majority of the respondents

At the institutional level, Lack of insight regarding Government orders was the major financial constrain identified. Handling social evils like alcohols and drugs, male dominated society were the identified socio political constraints.

Lack of basic knowledge among the elected women representatives and the bureaucratic control were the seriously affected administrative constraints identified.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Capacity building refers to excellence in individual performance, leadership development, socializing managerial values, technical skills, training opportunities, organizing abilities, and other areas of personal development that includes sensitivity to values of equity, participation and inclusion. The study helped in identifying the general profile of the elected representatives at the Palakkad district which directly contributed to the capacity building process. The problems that was faced by the women representatives at the grass root level were also identified from the study. A better training could help the representatives in leading the society to greater heights.

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