

**Education, Employment, and Job Preference of  
Women in Kerala: A micro-level case study**

**Lakshmy Devi K.R.**

**Discussion Paper No. 42  
2002**

**Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
Centre for Development Studies  
Thiruvananthapuram**

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English  
Discussion Paper

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First published 2002

Editorial Board: Prof. P. R. Gopinathan Nair, H. Shaji

Printed at:

Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development

Published by:

Dr K. N. Nair, Programme Co-ordinator,

Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development,

Centre for Development Studies,

Prasanth Nagar, Ulloor,

Thiruvananthapuram 695 011

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Url: <http://www.krpcds.org/>

Cover Design: Defacto Creations

**ISBN No: 81-87621-44-3**

**Price:       Rs 40  
                  US\$ 5**

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KRPLLD

2002

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ENG

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# Education, Employment, and Job Preference of Women in Kerala: A micro-level case study

Lakshmy Devi K.R\*

## 1.Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed rapid transformations in labour market structures in both developed and developing countries. The changes have been so dramatic that the work place in these countries is no longer a man's preserve. Women in large numbers have joined the labour force and taken up paid employment. Though the trend was first visible in Western industrialised nations, many of the developing countries have also witnessed significant growth in female labour force participation.

In most developing countries, the period since 1980 has witnessed increasing participation of women in recognised paid employment and this trend has intensified since 1990. Entry of women in larger proportions into the labour force has been, to a great extent, the result of changes in macro-economic policies during the Eighties and the Nineties.

The data for the past 20 years show that female labour force participation has increased, in general, in both developed and developing countries (Table 1.1). However, there seems to be wide divergences in the pattern of change between developed and developing countries. Developed countries which had relatively high female work participation rates even in 1971 experienced a further increase, which was marginal in the case of some countries like Germany but substantial in the case of Australia and China. China is the only country which has a female work participation rate above 50 percent. The Latin American countries like Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Peru which had moderately high levels of female participation have registered significant increase during the period. In African countries such as Nigeria

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*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This study would not have been possible but for the generous support from the Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development, which sponsored the study. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Programme Co-ordinator Dr K. Narayanan Nair and his team. I also thank Dr K. Nagaraj whose comments and suggestions have helped me in a big way in conceptualising and formulating the basic issues relating to women and work. The project was completed successfully with the co-ordinated work of my research team - Bindu Varghese, Bindu. K, Deepa Krishnan, Simon T. D, and Sreelatha K. Incidentally, all of them are old students of the Department of Economics, Dr John Matthai Centre of University of Calicut. I acknowledge my gratitude to them. I am extremely thankful to the Director, Institute of Planning and Applied Economic Research, University of Calicut for granting me affiliation and the University of Calicut for giving me permission to take up the study. This study by necessity is an exploratory one and as such it has its limitations. However, I am sure that its general conclusions will be useful for evolving policies for 'empowerment of women'. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all my respondents who despite various inhibitions co-operated very well with the researchers. My husband is the pillar of strength of all my academic endeavours. All my words would be insufficient for expressing my gratitude to him. Still this report would have remained inadequate had it not been for God Almighty who has made many impossibles possible in my life.*

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and South Africa, labour force participation rates of females declined. In the case of India also a marginal decrease in the rate is observed. Among the South Asian countries, except Pakistan, all others have FLPR higher than that of India.

**Table 1.1 Female labour force participation in selected countries 1971-1997**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1997</b>
<b><i>Industrialised Countries</i></b>		
U.K	35.9	42.6
U.S.A	37.1	45.7
France	36.5	39.0
Germany	40.4	41.1
Australia	31.9	43.6
China	41.8	55.7
Japan	38.9	43.3
<b><i>Latin American Countries</i></b>		
Peru	20.7	22.0
Chile	22.9	25.8
Mexico	18.9	25.6
Brazil	22.3	32.2
<b><i>African Countries</i></b>		
Nigeria	37.3	28.4
South Africa	33.1	29.4
<b><i>Middle Eastern Countries</i></b>		
U.S.A	4.3	18.9
Kuwait	9.0	24.7
Oman	6.4	8.6
<b><i>South Asian Countries</i></b>		
India	29.4	28.9
Pakistan	9.3	20.7
Bangladesh	5.5	44.3
Sri Lank	25.1	30.5

Source: World Employment Report 1998-1999

The increase in the rate in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh seems to be spectacular. One of the reasons that could be attributed to the increase in female labour force participation is the increasing globalisation trend which the world witnessed since the late eighties. Women's employment has gone up significantly in every region of the world, with the exception of Africa. This means, however, neither an improvement in the financial power of women nor elimination of gender-based discrimination (UN Report, 1999). The main aim of economic reform was to generate higher rates of economic growth. Economic growth does not, *per se* necessarily lead to reduction in gender inequalities.

The female labour force participation rate in India is not only low, but also has remained near-stagnant over the past several decades. Moreover, there still exists a large difference between the work participation rates of males and females, which is an important aspect of gender inequality. Besides, differences in the nature of work performed also bear evidence to gender inequality. Women are largely confined to unpaid work (at home or in the field) and casual labour, while men concentrate on more valued forms of remunerative work. The data on work force provided in the reports of the successive rounds of National Sample Survey (NSS) clearly point out the trend of increasing casualisation of the work force, the incidence of which is more severe among women than among men.

Kerala, which ranks first among the Indian States in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI), presents, however, a poor picture in terms of female work participation. This is paradoxical since the development experience of the State is universally acclaimed as a 'model' for poor States to follow for transforming the living conditions of their people, through 'enlightened' policies of promotion of health care and education. But, the most tragic failure of development in the State is the acute unemployment and low labour force participation rates of both men and women. Reckoned in terms of all the three measures of unemployment – usual status, current weekly status, and current daily status - used by NSS, Kerala has the highest incidence of unemployment both for males and females and in rural as well as urban areas. Educated unemployment in the State is even more severe. During the period 1983 to 1988, the unemployment rate of those with educational qualifications higher than SSLC went up only marginally from 6.96 percent to 7.24 percent in the country, while in Kerala it went up from 14.38 percent to 17.88 percent in the case of males and from 17.11 percent to 24.23 percent in the case of females. This clearly indicates that improvement in literacy and education has in no way improved the employment situation in the State. It is often held that education improves the employment opportunities of a woman and raises her earning potential. But the experience of Kerala suggests an inverse relationship between education and female employment. Whether education is the cause of unemployment or *vice versa* needs investigation. The rapid expansion of higher education in the State and the consequent steady increase in the supply of graduates swell the reservoir of educated unemployment in the State. There are distinct differences in job preferences as between educated and uneducated persons. It seems that the improvement in the educational levels of women in Kerala have created in them strong preference for white collar and salaried jobs and reduced their willingness to take up manual work. Preference for salaried employment and aversion to self-employment among educated job seekers of Kerala were documented in a few recent studies. However, the fact that even the uneducated have strong job preferences based on factors such as social status, class-consciousness, and the resulting inter-linkages in the social hierarchy, is new wisdom.

The pattern of employment, especially female employment, in the State is a complex phenomenon. Demographic, social, economic, and even political factors have contributed to this state of affairs. In Kerala, the pace of social development has far exceeded that of economic growth leading to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it has encouraged women to participate in economic activities. On the other hand, structural changes in the economy have put severe constraints on the prospects of female employment at the higher levels and led to a process of casualisation of the female labour force. It is observed that

most of the increase in employment under trade and commerce, construction, private transportation, and even manufacturing is accounted for by casual labour. This process of casualisation has been more severe in the case of women than men because of their limited mobility. Kerala women do not go out of their home villages to find work nearly as easily as men do.

The available secondary data on employment and unemployment suggest that the pattern of female employment in Kerala is different from the all-India pattern. Several studies exist on the various aspects of employment and unemployment in the State. All these studies except the one by E. T. Mathew (1997) are based on secondary data such as the reports of the various rounds of NSS on employment and unemployment and of the Census. The published tabulations of neither NSS nor Census go into the details of employment by level of education and job preferences. The only study based on primary data is the one by E. T. Mathew, which analyses unemployment in terms of preference for salaried employment but does not go deep into the factors that shape this preference pattern.

The decision of a woman, unlike that of a man, to participate in the labour force is, in general, the outcome of the decision-making of the household to which she belongs. Thus, the decision of a woman to participate in the labour force depends upon her personal and family characteristics and other intervening influences. The available studies based on macro level data are severely constrained in explaining the real factors that determine the labour force participation of women. Only micro-level studies based on household characteristics could provide a clear understanding of the economic behaviour of women. The present study is a modest attempt to explain female labour force participation in the State *vis-à-vis* all relationships that affect women and their efforts.

### **Objectives**

The study is an empirical investigation into the identification of factors that determine female labour force participation in the State on the basis of micro-level data. It tries to explain female labour force participation in terms of inter-linkages between education, employment, and job preferences. Specifically the objectives are

- (i) To identify the factors that determine labour force participation of women in Kerala on the basis of micro-level data;
- (ii) To examine the inter-linkages between job preferences, level of education, and employment status of women;
- (iii) To examine the relationship between female employment and other socio-economic variables like parental background, educational attainments, husband's socio-economic status, and household conditions; and
- (iv) To examine the inter-relationship between gender, work, and household conditions on the one hand and role of women in decision-making on the other.

### **Importance of the study**

It is true that economic development has improved the lot of a few nations over the past decade or two. But at the same time, the period has also witnessed degradation in the lives

of large numbers of people especially in the developing countries. And what is more surprising is the fact that economic development has shown a gender bias, i.e. as high as 70 percent of the world's poor, even today, are women. Besides, the socio-economic differentials between men and women continue to increase even in countries of the West; and the unemployment situation is worse for women than for men in both developed and developing countries. Moreover, economic restructuring is also affecting women everywhere, though its effects are much more severe in developing countries. South Korean economic reforms, since 1980, have had mixed impact on the economic status of women with increase in the number of women performing low status unpaid work (Fuess and Lee, 1994). The experience of countries in eastern and central Europe and erstwhile Soviet Union is also not much different. As a result of economic transformation, employment opportunities for women increased in the private sector in general and in export-oriented industries in particular. Such gains in employment may, however, be offset by reduction in employment in traditional sectors which employ women in large numbers (Government of India, 1995). The main aim of economic reforms is to generate higher rates of economic growth. But economic growth on its own, does not lead to reduction in gender inequalities. "Achieving greater equality involves a process of active social change which has no obvious link with economic growth" (Dreze and Sen, 1995). The economic reforms introduced in India in 1991, consisting of both stabilisation measures and a structural adjustment programme (SAP) is neither gender-neutral nor do they ensure a minimum fair status to women. The gender implications of these policies are difficult to be assessed using macro-level data alone. Analysis of the changes in the structure and pattern of employment alone would disclose their gender implications adequately. For this purpose, detailed data on household characteristics and their linkage with gender relations within the household need to be collected. It is in this context that the present study becomes important. It has been argued that development planning models especially in the Third World, following the neo-classical tradition, often under-cut the economic position of women that can lead to a 'ripple effect'. Micro-level studies of the present type assume added significance in the context of trying to depict inter-household gender relations *vis-à-vis* women's education and employment.

## **Methodology**

The study is based mainly on primary data collected from a random sample of households in Thrissur district of Kerala. The 502 households are divided into urban and rural on the basis of the proportion of rural and urban population in the district. According to 1991 census, 73.68 percent of the population in the district is rural and 26.32 percent urban. The proportions of female population are broadly the same. Thus 374 households (74.5 percent) from the rural areas and 128 households (25.5 percent) from the urban area were selected as the sample.

### ***Sampling design***

A multi-stage random sampling technique was used for the selection of households. The rural population of the district is spread over 98 *grama panchayats* and the urban population, over six municipalities. At the first stage, from each of the randomly selected five *panchayats* one ward and from the selected municipality two wards were selected at random. At the



second stage 80 households each were selected at random from the selected wards in the *panchayats* and 70 households each from the two selected wards in the municipality. Thus data were collected from a total of 540 households. However, due to incomplete information or partially filled information only 502 interview-schedules could be used for analysis. Primary data collection was done during the period January 1999 to April 1999. The randomly selected *panchayats* and the Municipality are listed below. For the selection of the ultimate sampling unit, the household, the latest electoral rolls were used.

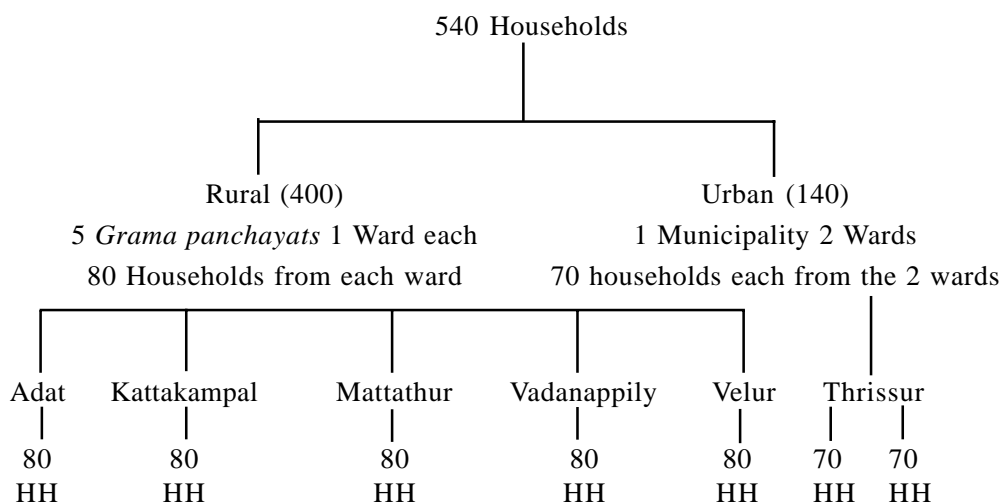
***Panchayats***

- (i) Adat
- (ii) Kattakampal
- (iii) Mattathur
- (iv) Vadanappilly
- (v) Velur

***Municipality***

Thrissur

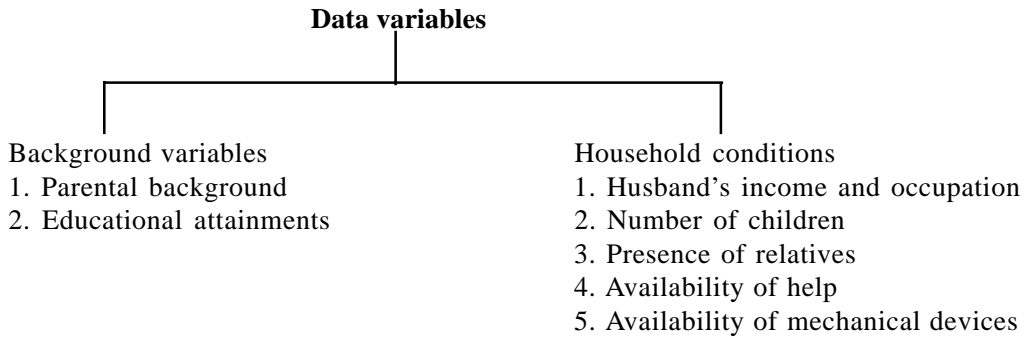
The flow chart for the multi-stage sampling is given below.



**Data collection**

Data collection was done through direct personal interview method by research investigators properly oriented for the purpose. All the four research investigators were former students of the Department of Economics, University of Calicut. Their acquaintance with the area and the assistance they received from village officials and local leaders greatly facilitated data collection. A well-structured, pre-tested schedule was used for the purpose of data collection. The schedule had four sections (i) General particulars, (ii) Household

characteristics, (iii) Data on employment [(a) salary earners (b) wage earners (c) self-employed (d) unemployed], and (iv) Data on background variables. In addition to these, the questionnaire contained several questions relating to job preference, decision to join the labour force, and the status of women in family and society. The main variables selected for data collection are divided into two broad categories and are shown in the following chart.



Data on these variables were collected with care and caution.

### **Conceptual framework**

The study follows the conceptual framework used by NSSO surveys on employment and unemployment in which measurement of employment and unemployment, in quantitative terms, is done at the disaggregate level of households. The persons surveyed are classified into various activity categories based on the activities pursued by them during certain specified reference periods. Three reference periods are used in these surveys. They are (i) one year, (ii) one week, and (iii) a day of the week. Based on these three periods, three different measures are arrived at. These are termed as usual status, current weekly status, and the current daily status. We have followed the ‘usual status’ approach in the present study. In this approach the status of activity on which a person spent relatively the largest part of his working time of the preceding 365 days from the date of survey is considered his/her principal usual status activity.

If a person was engaged for a relatively long time during the past year in any one or more work-related activities (economic activities) he/she is defined as a ‘usual principal status employed’ person. The person is considered ‘seeking or available’ for work or ‘unemployed’ if the person was not working but was either seeking or was available for work for a relatively long time during the reference year. If a person categorised as non-worker pursued some economic activity in a subsidiary capacity, he is considered ‘usual subsidiary status employed’. Since many women pursued subsidiary economic activities, we have used the ‘usual principal plus subsidiary’ classification in this study.

### **Usual status workers**

Following the NSSO classification, persons engaged in the following list of activities are considered usual status workers, in the present study.

- (i) Worked in household enterprises (self-employed) as worker;
- (ii) Worked in household enterprises (self-employed) as employer;
- (iii) Worked in household enterprises as helper;
- (iv) Worked as regular salaried/wage employee; and
- (v) Worked as casual labour.

### **Non-workers**

Persons engaged in the following activities are considered non-workers.

- (i) Attending educational institution as learner;
- (ii) Attending domestic duties only;
- (iii) Attending domestic duties and doing free collection of vegetables, roots, and firewood for household use;
- (iv) Rentiers, pensioners, and remittance recipients, not engaged in any remunerative work;
- (v) Disabled and handicapped, unable to work; and
- (vi) Infants of age 0-4 years.

### **Unemployed**

All persons seeking or available for work are considered unemployed.

### **Data source**

The study depends mainly on the primary data collected from 502 households spread over five *grama panchayats* and one municipality in Thrissur district. Secondary data on employment and unemployment from various sources such World Employment Reports, National Sample Survey, Decennial Population Censuses, Occupational Surveys, Rural Labour Enquiry Reports, Annual Surveys of Industries, Economic Reviews of the Kerala State Planning Board, and Economic Surveys of the Government of India are also used to analyse the trends in female labour force participation and also to corroborate the results arising from the primary data analysis.

### **Data analysis**

#### ***Multiple regression model***

The analysis is based on a synthesis of the insights in the economic theory of the household and sociological theory of female labour force participation. Economists developed the general theory of choice that describes the decision on labour force participation as the choice between market and non-market activities. Thus, the choice to work is influenced by household conditions such as presence of children, marital status, husband's economic status, and help available. The sociological theory developed a life cycle approach to female labour force participation. The present study combines the core ideas of both.

The extent of influence of the relevant variables is examined using multiple regression analysis. The dependent variable is participation in the labour force which is coded as a dummy variable taking values '1' if employed and '0' if unemployed. The explanatory variables are respondent's education, parent's education and employment, education, and employment of husband, family's income, number of children below five years of age, and presence of relatives in the household. The results of the regression are presented in Section 6.

### Chi-square( $\chi^2$ ) analysis

The influence of women's employment on gender relations within the household is analysed in terms of the role of employed and unemployed women in household decision-making. First, a few important decision-making areas were identified and simple 'yes' or 'no' answer type questions were framed. The answers of respondents with regard to these areas of decision-making were then tabulated into two (2x2) contingency tables and the statistical test of  $\chi^2$  was used to test the association between employment status and role in decision-making.

The  $\chi^2$  test was performed as follows:

Let  $n_{11}$  and  $n_{12}$  denote the number of employed women who responded positively (yes) and negatively (no) with regard to an area of decision-making and  $n_{21}$  and  $n_{22}$  the corresponding number of unemployed women.

$$\chi^2 = \frac{803(n_{11}n_{22} - n_{12}n_{21})^2}{(n_{11} + n_{12})(n_{21} + n_{22})(n_{11} + n_{21})(n_{12} + n_{22})}$$

In the sample, the total number of female respondents was 803. This estimated value of  $\chi^2$  was compared with the table value of  $\chi^2$  at one percent level of significance for one degree of freedom. Where the estimated value of  $\chi^2$  was found to be greater than the table value of  $\chi^2$  the association under examination was taken as statistically significant.

### *Status grades*

Status scores are worked out to compare the status of employed and unemployed women according to their perception of their socio-economic status. For this specific purpose, they were asked five questions relating to socio-economic status. These questions were simple and unambiguous so that elicitation of a 'yes' or 'no' answer to each was possible. For each positive answer 20 scores were given and thus the maximum score was taken as 100. A total score of 60 and above is taken as indicative of high status; less than 30 indicates low status and 30-60 medium status. The status scores were estimated for both employed and unemployed women and thus provided a method, though crude, for comparing the socio-economic status of the two groups.

## **Plan of the study**

The study is presented in the six sections. The second section presents a review of literature, which have direct or indirect relevance to the present study. In the third section the conceptual issues and empirical evidence relating to female labour force participation are discussed. The theoretical models of female labour force participation are examined in detail. The hypothesis of feminisation of work in the world scenario and its relevance in the Indian context are examined. Changes in the structural distribution of the work force over the years are also analysed. The analysis in Sections 4, 5, and 6 is based exclusively on the primary data collected from the sample households except for the development profile of the selected *panchayats* and municipality given in Section 4. The socio-economic characteristics of the sample households are also examined in Section 4. The fifth section is devoted to the analysis of the inter-relationships between gender, work, and household relations. The question whether or not economic independence confers a higher status on women in the household is analysed using three different methods: (i) getting direct response from employed women as to whether economic independence has improved their position in the gender hierarchy, (ii) testing the association between employment status and role in decision-making using  $\chi^2$  test, and (iii) estimating status scores for both employed and unemployed women on the basis of their response to 10 status-indicating questions. An economic model in which sociological variables are also incorporated for analysing female labour force participation is developed in Section 6. The multiple regression method is used for this purpose. A detailed analysis of the preference pattern of both the employed and the unemployed women is also attempted in this section. The final section gives the summary of the findings and draws the major conclusions of the study.

## **Limitations of the study**

As stated earlier, this micro-level research is, by necessity, only exploratory, since such studies do not exist in Kerala though a large number analysing female labour force participation at the macro level are available. Macro-level data on employment and unemployment collected by both the NSS and the Censuses have failed to include job preference among reasons for unemployment. Moreover, the impact of female labour force participation on gender relation within the household also lies outside the purview of NSS and Censuses, a question which could be addressed only by micro-level studies. However, the present study has its limitation in terms of data and method such as inaccuracies in information supplied by respondents on nature and extent of work. The methodological constraint is mainly in terms of defining participation, which cannot be obviated even if we follow the NSS conceptual framework. This being a study based on a limited sample the policy conclusions emerging from it may not have universal validity.

## 2 Theoretical Discourse on Female Labour Force Participation

The theoretical basis for explaining female labour force participation could be collapsed into three main paradigms (i) Neo-classical, (ii) Feminist or Radical, and (iii) Marxian. Analytical and empirical studies have attempted to explain labour force participation, occupational discrimination, and wage differentials. But as the theoretical basis itself was quite often gender-neutral, the studies have, in general, failed to capture diversity in women's work situations. However, an attempt is made in this section to explain the theoretical formulations relating to female labour force participation.

### The neo-classical framework

The neoclassical paradigm, which focused on male full-time labour in the capitalist manufacturing sectors, paid no attention to women labour. Thus, neo-classical economics had little or nothing to deal with the issues of gender either in terms of conceptualisation or in terms of methodology. However, in response to the growing importance of women in the labour market, it has extended analysis to women's problems also since the Seventies.

Household economics, an extension of neo-classical economics, initiated by economists such as Jacob Mincer (1962), Garry S. Becker (1965), G. C. Cain (1966), and R. Gronau (1977) tried to explain female labour force participation in terms of household characteristics. Mincer attempted to answer the question with the focus on the supply characteristics of married women. He argued that the decision whether the wife should enter the paid labour force or not could involve not only the income and substitution effects of market work *versus* leisure but also the income and substitution effect of market *versus* unpaid house work. Cain tried to explain the difference in the labour force activity of white and non-white married women based on Mincer's model using various sources of aggregate and disaggregate data. Becker (1965) and Bowen and Finigen (1969) elaborated the basic economic theory of the household. Their theory rests upon the assumption that the household is a consumer as well as decision-making unit. The decision-making process is aimed at maximising the well-being of the household which is constrained by time and financial constraints. Thus, the household faces the problem of allocating time between market work and leisure. Another study by Morgan, Serigaldin, and Bacwaldt (1975), which analysed the determinants of working wives, found that three variables which were overwhelmingly important were husband's income, wife's education, and wife's age. Liba Paukert (1982) reported that large-scale entry of women into labour force in the industrialised countries has been the result of non-economic – educational, demographic, and social – factors, as also economic factors such as monetisation of the household economy, rise in female wage, and rapid development of the service sector.

Several studies conducted in developed countries have identified the strong influence of household characteristics on the labour force participation of women. Treiman and Terrel (1975) and Mc Clendon (1976) found that the mother's educational and occupational characteristics were more powerful determinants of women's occupational status than father's. Smoke (1981) found that educational attainment increased women's willingness to work, improved their employment opportunities, and raised their earning potential. Smoke's study

of five developing countries reported a curvilinear relationship between female education and employment. Presser and Baldwin (1980) found that the presence of young children affected the married women's labour force participation adversely. Mason and Palan (1981) found that household's economic structure was also a major determinant of female labour force participation. Lustig and Rendon (1979) found that high economic status of the household may promote wife's employment partly as a result of egalitarian attitude and higher educational attainment of wives. A detailed survey of theoretical and empirical research on female labour supply is given in Killingsworth (1983) and Heckman and Killingsworth (1986). The collection of studies edited by Leyard and Mincer (1983) provides interesting evidence of 12 industrialised countries.

By the late Seventies researchers in the field of development began questioning the adequacy of focussing on women in isolation, a practice which seemed to them to be dominant in research. Many influential writings appeared in the Seventies on the distinction between biological sex and social gender (Edholm, et al, 1977; Lubin, 1975).

The propagators of this school wanted to develop a theory of gender which was integrated into and informed by the general analysis of the world economy (Pearson, 1981). 'Gender' has become the panacea of those working in the field, yet few analyses exist of the way in which gender is being applied as a policy-making and planning tool. The new theoretical approach illustrates an innovative and systematic way of thinking about 'gender' using economic tools of analysis. The insights gained from the way gender works at the micro-economic level are in turn linked to macro-economic policy concerns. The theoretical underpinning for this framework is provided by the 'sex-role theory' (Cornell, 1987) which treats households as systems in resource allocation (Sims Feldstein and Poats, 1989). Gender analysis is described as a diagnostic tool for planners to overcome inefficient resource allocation (Overholt, et al, 1985).

The inter-relationship among economics, gender, and household variables has only recently begun to receive the attention of researchers, though the topic of intra-household economic relationship had received the attention of sociologists much earlier. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), Dwyer and Bruce (1988), and Blumberg (1991) have given detailed descriptions of the triangular relationship among family, household, and the gender-stratification system in different settings. The main factor seen as affecting intra-household gender stratification is relative incomes of males and females. Specifically, the studies conclude that with greater relative income, women are seen to have greater voice and leverage in family decisions and somewhat greater say in the overall relationships.

Blumstien and Schwartz (1983) and Ross (1987) indicate that male/female economic resources and gender ideologies do affect the relative apportionment of housework. Lein's empirical works (1984) show that when man undertakes child care and domestic chores, he tends to skim off the cream. Several studies have pointed out that women have in general provider obligations towards their families, especially to their own children (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Blumberg, 1991). Several studies have pointed out that when marriages are unstable and polygamy is prevalent, men and women maintain separate purses for most income streams and expenditures (Guyer, 1988; Staudt, 1987; Fapohunde, 1988).

Neo-classical economists following the Becker's model of 'new home economics' failed to consider what husband *versus* wife may control or do within the household. Accordingly, they treat the household as a unitary entity, for which a single production function is sufficient. Thus, according to the neo-classical paradigm, it does not matter who works and who brings in the income. But as early as 1960, the US sociologists had argued that what goes on within the family does matter. Thus, the relationship between gender, relative resources, and marital power constituted their focus of attention (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Blumberg, 1984). Blumberg and Coleman (1989) emphasise the importance of relative male/female control of income and other resources as a major determinant of decision-making. Blumberg (1991), on the basis of Third World data, demonstrates that men and women have distinct expenditure patterns. Blumberg (1991) further reports that women spend more for the family's sustenance and upbringing of children.

Lockwood (1992) examines gender differences in control over land and labour in African agriculture and attributes them to economic history. Palmer (1991) on the other hand concludes that economic process associated with structural adjustments accentuated gender biases. Both the studies relate to African agriculture. Feminist economists like Elson (1993) are less optimistic than neo-classical economists about the ability of the markets to provide gender equity. Whitehead (1990) attempts to fill the gap between the neo-classical models that treat the household as a single unit and other models that treat men and women within the household separately. She challenges the view that economic separation between husbands and wives is total. The gender-efficiency approach advocated by Kabir (1991) and Young (1993) highlights the importance of directing economic resources to women and the need for action-oriented political strategies to bring about women's empowerment. Young, who is among the few advocates of empowerment, also recognises the importance of more practical NGO initiatives as a means of politicising women's issues. Westwood's (1991) study of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in India highlights its success in generating and reproducing a collective consciousness among women workers.

The general theory of choice in the neo-classical economics views the decision of a woman to participate in the labour force as a choice between work and leisure which is influenced by changes in wage rate. A change in wage rate produces two effects on labour supply. The 'substitution effect', produces more work because it raises the cost of leisure relative to work. The other, called 'income effect' produces less work because it increases purchasing power. Generally for men as well as for single women, income effect was supposed to outweigh substitution effect. As work within home does not constitute their major activity, their choice was narrowed down to either market work or leisure. But this theory was criticised mainly for its limited application (Sweet, 1973). The theory, for instance, was unable to explain the labour force participation of married women for whom domestic work is an important variable in the choice structure. Thus, it was emphasised that analysis of female labour force participation should take place within the context of the family or household.

Applying the concept of income and substitution effect, Mincer (1962) and Cain (1966) proposed a theory of labour supply that applies especially to married women. Within the context of the family, a rise in income has different effects on its members. For wives,



housework is a major responsibility and thus an important substitute for time. Thus, in their case, substitution effect could be larger than for other adults. On the whole, female labour supply increases when the substitution effect is much greater than the income effect. Becker (1965), Bowen and Finegan (1969), and Berk and Berk (1983) later elaborated on this basic theory of choice. All these theories rest upon the assumption that the household is a consuming as well as decision-making unit. In this household model, known as 'new household economics', there are three categories of consumables: market goods, (goods and services purchased for a price) home goods (goods and services produced and consumed at home), and leisure (time not spent in market or home work). In a collective decision-making process aimed at maximising the well-being of the household, they face two constraints, time and financial resources. Participation of women in the labour force thus becomes an outcome of decision-making of the family regarding income and leisure.

### **Labour market discrimination**

Neo-classical theory views occupational segmentation in the labour market as an extension of the biological division of labour. Owing to their early entry into the labour market, men have greater access to specialised skills. Marginal differences in the initial skill levels are compounded and result in the segregation of women and assigning to them of non-specialised and unskilled jobs.

Using the neo-classical framework a few hypotheses have come up to explain labour market discrimination. They are (i) Overcrowding Hypothesis, (ii) Human Capital Hypothesis, and (iii) Co-operative Conflict Hypothesis.

#### ***Overcrowding hypothesis***

Millicent Fawcett who was the first advocate of this hypothesis argued that women overcrowd in unskilled jobs which leads to low wages and poor working conditions in these jobs. He found that trade unions' rules, employees' rules, their attributes and prejudices and social customs deny skilled jobs to women resulting in their overcrowding in unskilled occupations and consequent pull down of their general wage levels.

#### ***Human capital hypothesis***

This model argues that difference in wages and segregation in work is largely due to differences in the human capital content of male and female work reflected in differences in productivity. The theory assumes that as women's prior commitment is to the home and because of long hours of work at home, women are usually seen as less committed to work outside home and hence are less paid than men.

Following the neo-classical framework of supply and demand Millicent Fawcett, F. Y. Edgeworth, and P. Sargent Florence put forth the theory that women earn less than men because their relative needs are less since they have fewer dependents.

The 'New Home Economics' assumes that the historical division of labour between men

and women has resulted in creating a comparative advantage for men in market activities and for women in household activities. Sexual division of labour within the household assumes man to be the 'bread winner' and woman's work as secondary or subsidiary. Thus, though women are burdened with double roles, combining domestic unpaid work with paid work, outside home, in paid work, they are relegated to non-skilled and non-specialised jobs in which experience, skills, and efficiency requirements are less and hence payments are also low.

### ***Co-operative conflict models***

Though an extension of neo-classical model, unlike in the neo-classical models which assume individual units, in this model families are visualised as centres of conflicts and co-operation. But because of the low deal that women have in the sexual division of labour within the household, they have weak outcomes both within the household and at the work place. This results in their overcrowding in jobs in which payments are low and working conditions poor.

The empirical model that emerged in the Seventies and the Eighties using neo-classical framework could not explain segregation and wage-gap adequately.

### **The feminist framework**

The feminist framework strongly rooted in the theory of patriarchy came up in response to the strong wave of feminism in the Sixties in the western world. The central idea behind this approach is that the position of women in the labour market is governed by patriarchy, or rather, male dominance. It was successful not only in exposing the male bias of the existing theories, but in bringing out the primacy of the gender relations as well. Consequently, the feminist framework using the theory of patriarchy became central to the study of women and labour market in sociology, economics, and political economy models. By adding a gender dimension to the existing models, this approach resulted in evolving a dual system theory, one dealing with the labour market and the other dealing with the position of women in it. It assumed that patriarchy and the resultant male dominance were the products of capitalism with one conditioning the other. But patriarchy being a social system has its own social, cultural, and historical specificities which make theorising difficult.

During the same period domestic labour and sexual division of labour emerged as inter-related categories in a conceptual framework for dealing with women's oppression in the labour market. This framework stipulates that women are exploited by men in the labour market as an extension of their oppression at home. Based on the Marxian framework, like in the theory of patriarchy, it argues that women are exploited by men in the household as capitalists exploit labour. House work is seen as the major source of exploitation which extends further to the market resulting in the double exploitation of women.

### **Marxian framework**

The classical Marxian paradigm is largely gender-neutral with its emphasis on class relations

in the capitalist mode of production. Women's economic status is seen as a direct result of the capitalist family structure. In the Marxist perspective gender issues form part of class conflicts.

The idea of the 'reserve army of labour' originally developed by Marx was later adopted by many authors within the socialist-feminist framework (Beechey, 1977 & 1982; Anthias, 1980). According to the Marxian interpretation, the reserve army of labour is the result of capitalist development caused by replacement of labour by machines. The disadvantaged position of women in the labour market identifies them with the reserve army of labour; being the most volatile fraction of the labour market, they are increasingly thrown out of employment as capitalist development proceeds. Marx has distinguished three forms of the reserve army of labour, floating (who are unemployed recently), latent (who are not employed previously), and stagnant (who are unemployed for a long time). But the increased participation of women in the labour market during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries has laid bare the inconsistency in the theory.

Modified versions of the reserve army model, the substitution hypothesis and the model of compositional change, have tried to solve the inconsistency in the theory. The substitution hypothesis postulates an increase in women's employment and subsequent displacement of man in sectors where women's employment is high. The compositional shift theory argues that women's employment can increase only when there is a shift in relative importance of the different sectors. These two theories support each other. All the above theories have been, however, unable to provide a strong theoretical base for the observed reality.

Within the Marxist framework the most important development is the theory of segmented labour market evolved in the Seventies. The theory of patriarchy is central in the theory of segmentation also. Patriarchy is of two types, private and public. Women are oppressed at home either by husband or father; religion and state subordinate women and perpetuate male dominance (Walby, 1988). Three factors are prominent in the theory of segmentation. They are (i) the male dominance and male strategies leading to the exclusion of women from employment, (ii) the restructuring of jobs with accumulation of capital and change in the organisational forms of production and management control, and (iii) the restructuring of sexual division of labour based on the pre-existing notions of femininity and masculinity.

The Labour Process Theory of Braverman (1974) is perhaps the most important contribution to the theory of segmented labour market within the Marxist framework. According to this theory skills are socially constructed and hence gendered. As capitalist development proceeds and more labour is displaced by machines a deskilling process ensues. This leads to the creation of a hierarchy of jobs. Since women already have a lower position in the social hierarchy they get inferior positions in the labour market also. Moreover, skilled male labour being reluctant to take up unskilled work, women are pushed down to the unskilled categories of work. Braverman's idea of deskilling has been severely criticised on the ground that capitalist process also has a counterpart in reskilling in which new skills are created.

Later developments in the theory of labour process have looked into this aspect of re-skilling in women's employment (Cockburn, 1986 & 1988). The theory of exclusion argues that in any upgrading of work through re-skilling women, tend to be excluded unless and until men abandon these jobs. Cockburn (1988) and Hartman (1979) had also subscribed to this view. These theories further point out to the role of trade unions, dominated by men, in excluding women from skilled occupations (Hartmann, 1979).

The domestic labour debate which emerged in the seventies and the eighties was in fact a synthesis of the theory of patriarchy and Marxism. Contrary to the traditional Marxian view about the unproductive nature of domestic labour, the debate emphasised that domestic labour involves production of simple use values for direct consumption especially the production and reproduction of the special commodity called labour power. The debate replaces capitalist production in the Marxian framework by household production. In the earlier model husband is the source of exploitation who exploits the wife through the mode of production called housework. But in the later version, the surplus labour of the housewife is passed to the capitalist through husband's labour who appropriates the surplus as profit by paying labour less than its marginal productivity.

The analytical models discussed in the foregoing sections have incorporated gender as a variable in the framework of analysis. In later versions of all the models gender was treated as neutral. As such these models and related analyses are only partial and fail to explain reality in total. The importance of the household in women's activities has largely remained neglected in these analyses. The recognition that women's relative economic power is the most important variable that decides her bargaining power within the household in terms of control of key economic resources, is also found missing in the above models. Several U.S. sociologists (MC Donald, 1980; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Blumberg, 1984; Kranichfeld, 1987) who consistently worked on this theme have come out with the conclusion that though economic power of women does have a decisive role in gender stratification responsibilities within the household have a negative impact on female employment. In fact, the interlinkages between female employment and gender relations within the household are quite significant and they do affect social relations.

### **Economic reforms and female labour force participation**

The past few years have seen drastic changes in the economic structures of countries all over the world. Economic restructuring is affecting both men and women. But its implication is definitely different on the two sexes. For example, economic policies of trade liberalisation assume that labour is freely mobile, so that resources can be shifted from one sector to another. But the sex-based division of labour makes it more difficult for women relative to men to switch from employment in non-tradable production sectors to sectors of tradable production. It is often argued that increased global competition consequent on economic restructuring will lead to feminisation of work force. Cohen argues that the demand for labour would increase with new competition from low wage countries and consequently as low wage spreads, women's employment would increase and women would be increasingly substituted for male workers (Cohen, 1994). But it is equally plausible to argue that intensified

international competition could bring about a sufficient regression in wages in general so that the cost advantage of hiring women over men would not be sufficient to change the gender typing of jobs (Upadhyay, 1998). The experience of the Eastern European countries and Russia which introduced radical economic reforms shows that whatever be the transformation possible in the long run, unemployment has grown significantly and most of the unemployed workers are women. Job situation for middle-aged educated women has become quite difficult in Russia in recent years (Mc Mahon, 1994).

### **Studies on gender relations and structural adjustment programmes**

Since the 1980s, many developing countries introduced Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Several studies in recent years have investigated the interaction between gender relations and the process of SAPs. Studies by Beneria and Roldan (1987), Cornia, Jolly and Stewart (1987), Sen and Grown (1987), Commonwealth Secretariat (1989), Elson (1991, 1993), Palmer (1991), Haddad (1991), Gladwin (1991), Afshar and Dennis (1992), Beneria and Feldman (1993), Bakker (1994) and Sparr (1994) are a few among them. These studies broadly reflect on how gender relations are affected by SAPs. Cagatay, Elson, and Grown (1995) have attempted to develop theoretical and empirical macro-economic models that incorporate gender as an important aspect. A feminist approach incorporating gender relations in the household analysis is attempted by several authors like Sen (1990), Agarwal (1992), Seize (1991), Lockwood (1992), Elson (1995), Beneria and Roldan (1987), and Cagatay (1997).

There is now considerable empirical evidence linking Structural Adjustment Programmes and feminisation of work force. Using cross-country data pooled for 1985 and 1990, Cagatay and Ozler analysed female labour force participation and macro-economic changes associated with structural adjustment. They found that structural adjustment policies have led to increasing feminisation of labour force. But feminisation takes place mostly in the informal sector through home working *via* worsening income distribution and increased openness (Cagatay and Ozler, 1995). Many economists attributed the increased feminisation of labour force since the Eighties to supply-side macro-economic policies and structural adjustment in which the gender gaps in earnings are more pronounced than in the formal sector due to the relative difficulty of organising members for collective action (Cagatay, 1997).

Structural adjustment programmes as such do not consider the question of gender explicitly, making them more or less gender-neutral (Elson, 1995; Bakker, 1994; Nelson, 1995). Since men and women play distinctly different roles, the distribution of the costs and effects of structural adjustment tend to be different for them. It appears that the substitutability between male labour and female labour is limited. Thus, women are not able to reallocate their time in tune with the changes in market and non-market activities. This is truer in the case of women in developing countries where women live in worse circumstances. Thus, though economic restructuring is affecting women all over the world, its effects are much more severe in developing countries. It is observed that in general, women bear a disproportionate share of the costs, whereas men are the gainers, of structural adjustment. Moreover, it is observed that in some of the developing countries

women have in recent years been losing some of the basic gains won by them during the Seventies and the Eighties (Upadhyay, 1998). Even today well over 70 percent of the world's poor are women. Economic growth, by itself, cannot reduce gender inequalities. As Dreze and Sen have rightly put it "achieving greater quality involves a process of active social change which has no obvious links with economic growth" (Dreze and Sen, 1995).

### **3. Female Labour Force Participation: Empirical studies**

#### **Earlier studies on female labour force participation**

The upsurge of an active women's liberation movement in the western world during the Sixties produced a rich crop of studies on women and gender. During the early years much of the research was conducted in developed and industrialised countries most of which were limited to discussing prevailing employment characteristics and participation rates. An increase in the level of awareness and understanding about women's role in labour came with the publication of Boserup's (1970) pioneering work. Collver and Langlois (1962) had even earlier undertaken a study on female economic participation in 38 countries comprising both developed and developing nations. Their study as well as the studies by Youssef (1974), de Miranda (1977), and Chinchilla (1977) suggested that trends in female participation in developed countries were positively related to economic development, but that the same relationship was not universally observed in developing countries. These studies further found that the compatibility between familial and economic roles had a great influence on the extent of female employment.

Women in the Third World received the attention of researchers all over the world only since the declaration of the UN Decade for Women in 1975. Tinker, et al, (1976), Rogers (1980), Deitch (1980), Dauber and Cain (1981), Beneria (1982), Whyte and Whyte (1982), Buvenic, et al, (1983), and Charlton (1984) are some of the early researchers who delved into the problem. Roos (1985) who compared the experience of several industrial societies in terms of female work experience concluded that human capital theory with its emphasis on training and job commitment is inadequate to explain female labour force participation.

Several country case studies on female labour force participation have also emerged since the late Seventies. The study by Chinchilla (1977) on Guatemalan women concludes that women joined the labour force at a more rapid rate than men since 1950. The other studies on women conducted during the period include the ones by Hernandez (1975) on Puerto Rico, Lustig and Rendon (1979) on Mexico, Arenas de Acosta (1980) on Venezuela, Gonzalez (1977) on Philippines, Hill (1981) on Japan, Mason and Palan (1981) on Malaysia, Kiribanda (1981) on Sri Lanka, and World Bank (1985) on Latin America. All these studies have pointed out the higher rates at which women have been entering the labour force since the fifties.

Sex-typing of jobs has been a recurring theme in many of the earlier studies relating to women and work. Barret (1979), Miller (1980), Deitch (1980), and Malik (1981) showed that women's employment have certain persistent characteristics irrespective of country or region. Women were overcrowded in low status jobs and earned much less than men even when they had the same educational background and work experience. Arizpe (1977), Ehlers (1980), and Waite (1981) also subscribe to this view.

#### **Empirical studies**

As macro-level data indicate, the past four decades have seen an upsurge in female labour

force participation all over the world, both in developed countries as well as developing countries. Several factors have been responsible for this. On the demand side, a general rise in the demand for labour consequent upon expansion of output and a rise in the education of women are two important factors. With the increasing share of services in GNP, demand for labour in typical female occupations like clerical and service jobs has been growing very fast. Increase in women's education leading to their acquiring greater skills has also led to an increase in female labour force participation. On the supply side, rising wages for women, changes in family composition and lower male earnings have also contributed to pushing up female labour force participation. Another important factor, especially in western countries, was the increase in the proportion of single women who had no alternative but to join the labour force for sustenance.

During the period 1975-1993, in most of the European countries, the share of women in the labour force registered a significant increase. In Italy it rose from 27 to 36.7 percent; in France from 37.8 percent to 45 percent and in United Kingdom from 38.3 percent to 43.7 percent. During 1970 to 1990, the increase was from 37 percent to 45 percent in the US and from 32 percent to 45 percent in Canada.

In the countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union the labour force participation rate for women had been quite high as early as in the Sixties. In the Seventies in most of these countries the rate ranged between 45 and 51 percent, at levels much higher than in Western European nations and the USA. This was mainly because of the state policies followed during the socialist regime, which had explicit commitment to gender equality. The same was the case with China, under the Communist Government committed to gender equality. As early as in the Seventies, the female labour force participation rate in China was 42 percent, one of the highest in the world. In 1982 the female labour force as a percentage of adult population was as high as 70 percent in China compared to 52 percent in the United States.

Though the participation of women in economic activities has grown significantly in the past few decades, women have not won occupational equality. In many of the developed countries, women have taken up most of the newly created jobs, a process which is often referred to as feminisation of the labour force. Meulders, Plasman and Plasman (1997) report that a significant proportion of women in the member states of the European Union participates in atypical labour relations such as part-time employment, temporary employment, and unusual schedule employment involving inferior and hazardous labour conditions. Thus, the age-old problems of segregation and low pay scales still predominate female employment scenarios. European labour markets are in general characterised by high female labour force participation and a high degree of segregation by gender. Denmark and the United Kingdom with the highest female labour force participation rates display as great a degree of segregation by gender as countries like Greece and Spain with lower female participation rates (Plantega, 1997).

Gender-earnings ratio defined as the gross monthly earnings of female workers as percent of gross monthly earnings of male workers is an index of the progress of women across societies and over time. Data on this ratio for the European countries clearly indicate that



women continue to receive wages lower than of men. For manual workers in industry the highest is found in France (women getting 80.8 percent of men's wages); the lowest is in Luxemburg (63.2 percent). For non-manual work the situation is still worse. The highest gender-earnings ratio is found in Germany (66.5 percent) and the lowest in United Kingdom (55.2 percent) (Plantega, 1997). In the United States, however, there has been an increase in this ratio from 59 percent in 1970 to 70 percent in 1991 (Jacobsen, 1994). Despite the increase, the earning gap remains substantial.

Bakker (1994) observes that the increasing participation of women in the labour force in Canada does not seem to have had any significant impact on the level of segregation of work by gender. Moreover, a comparison of the wage data changes from 1984 to 1990 clearly indicates a widening of the wage gap between men and women in many occupations. For full-time work the gender-earning ratio declined from 63.3 percent in 1984 to 60.9 percent in 1990 (Bakker, 1994). Bakker also notes the trend towards intensification of part-time and temporary work for women.

Japan has one of the lowest gender-earnings ratios in the developed world with a fairly high labour force rate of 40 percent which has remained stagnant ever since 1970. Non-agricultural hourly earnings ratio of women to men was 51 percent in 1990 and in manufacturing it was still lower at 41 percent. Gender discrimination in Japan is thus seen to be more severe than in the Western countries. Strong cultural values restrain women from labour force activities when they have small children; re-entry to work is difficult; and often women end up in low-paying jobs.

In India too a number of studies came up in the context of the new economic policy. Ahamed (1994), Shah, et al, (1994), Ghosh (1996), and Kundu (1997) contribute to the view that changes in macro-economic policies have been responsible for the trend towards feminisation of work in India.

### **Studies on gender and work in India**

Quite a large number of studies relating to women and work in India have emerged during the past few decades. But most of the studies available are based on macro-level data drawn either from the Census or NSS. Very few studies have attempted to explain female labour force participation through economic theories of the household. Perhaps the first attempt in this area was that of Datar (1958) which examined female employment during the period 1901-1951. Thorner (1962) analysed the trend in female employment during a longer period, 1881-1951. The studies during the late Seventies were made mainly in response to the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India submitted in 1975. Studies by Bardhan (1978), and Parthasarathy and Rao (1980) fall in this category. Ambannavar (1975), using census data, analysed the trend in employment of men and women over several decades. He also identified women-absorbing and women-deflecting industries. Prakash (1975) also attempted a trend analysis of occupational changes using census data. Dandekar's study (1975) tries to explain the reasons for declining sex ratio in India. Sinha (1961) attributed technological change as the reason for declining female employment in some industries and services. Parthasarathy and Rao (1981) also give a comprehensive picture of women in the

Indian labour force. Other studies such as the ones by Reddy (1977), Paul (1982), and Mukhopadhyay (1982) also discuss reasons for declining female labour force participation in India.

Malathy (1983) examined the determinants of married women's labour force participation based on data from Madras city. Sen's (1983) study of the Indian Census focussed on women agricultural labourers in India. Kynch and Sen (1983) and Mies (1986) discussed the survival strategies for women in the Indian labour force. Mehra and Saradamoni (1983) examined how women are involved in the process of rural transformation in India. Chatterji (1984) discussed how women in agriculture were marginalised and transformed into wage earners. Banerjee (1985) gives an exposure of the women workers in the unorganised sector in India. Desai (1987), analysing women's education in India during the period 1981-1987, explained how gender justice could be established through education. National Institute of Urban Affairs (1987) examined the gender bias in employment in India with special reference to the urban informal sector. Duvvury (1988) explains the trends in work participation of women in India during the period 1961-1981.

The Ministry of Labour, Government of India (1988) published two important documents, namely, the *National Perspective Plan for Women* and the *Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector* which give a comprehensive picture of the female employment situation in the country. Kalpagam (1988), using NSS data, examined women labour force in India in detail. Mencher (1988) described female poverty and women's contribution to household maintenance in two regions of South India. Bhalla (1988) examined, on the basis of sample evidence from Haryana, how technological change affected female employment in agriculture. The methodological issues relating to measuring female labour force participation in India are discussed in Anker, Khan, and Gupta (1988). The issues and opportunities concerning women in Indian agriculture were dealt at length by the World Bank (1989), Varma (1992), and Samantha (1995). Sharma (1993) studied employment patterns and working conditions of women in rural Bihar. Anker and others (1993) attempted to identify the socio-economic variables that influence the activity profile and time-use pattern of women in India. Vaidyanathan's study (1994) gives a picture of the employment situation in the country and points out that there are distinct differences in the job preferences of educated and uneducated workers. Jose (1989) gives a comprehensive picture of various aspects of female employment in India. The recent study on women's employment in India by Visaria (1996), based on NSS data, also has analysed the trends and differentials in female labour force participation in India.

Horton (1996) points out that while in most Asian countries women move to regular jobs, in the case of India, they move to the less advantageous status of casual employees. Moreover, compared to countries like South Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand, women's work participation in India is marked by relatively low and stagnant rates.

Normative implications of higher levels of female labour force participation do not seem to have been adequately explored in India. Sen (1996) argues that independent income-earning opportunities reduce the economic dependence of women on men. Dreze (1997) concludes that higher levels of female labour force participation are likely to have important effects on

social institutions. He points out that at the household level, the link between adult female labour force participation and girls' schooling tends to be negative. But Jayachandran (1997) indeed found a positive link between adult female labour force participation and girls' schooling. Dreze and Sen (1996) discussed the problem of gender inequality in India, in terms of exceptionally low female-male ratio. Murthi, Guio, and Dreze (1995) have examined the gender bias in India on the basis of an analysis of variations in under-five mortality rates among different districts of India in 1981. Their study suggests that modernisation amplifies the gender bias in child survival and leads to a more significant conclusion that forces of development and modernisation do not necessarily lead to any perceptible reduction in gender inequalities. Many Indian writers have argued that economic development had an adverse impact on female work, pushing women to the grades of inferior casual workers. Many others including Banerjee (1996, 1997) and Unni (1997) have also argued that there has been a continuous and steady casualisation of female workforce in India. Deshpande (1997) points out to the declining trend in the number of female workers in the organised sector. Studies by Varghese (1993), Parthasarathy and Nirmala (1997), and Visaria (1995) come to the conclusion that there has taken place large-scale feminisation of agricultural work during recent years. The issue of discrimination and marginalisation of women in terms of wages and earnings in agriculture is the theme of the study of Unni (1997).

Issues relating to conceptual and empirical invisibility of women's work and other related issues like paid/unpaid work, domestic work, and problems of measurement of women's work were the main focus in the writings of Mitra (1984), Duvvury and Isaac (1989), Mukherjee (1996), and Suryanarayanan (1998). These studies also criticised the characterisation of women's work as supplementary by the existing data systems.

### **Data sources on female labour force participation in India**

The statistics on female labour force participation in India are provided mainly by two sources, the Census and the NSSO. Decennial Censuses are the oldest data source on population characteristics from as early as 1901. Information on the magnitude, structure, and pattern of employment by sex is available from the Census; data on occupational distribution (up to three-digit classification) and age and education are also available. Details of employment for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are available separately. The census earlier defined a worker as 'one who has worked and contributed to the economically productive activity, mentally or physically at any time preceding the date of enumeration'. The definition has undergone changes across the censuses.

The 1981 Census, for the first time, classified workers into 'main workers' and 'marginal workers'. If a person has worked for more than six months or 183 days in the preceding year, he/she is treated as a main worker. 'Marginal worker', on the other hand, is a person who has worked for some time but not for the major part of the year. Census gives also the nine-fold industrial classification of workers. A person is counted as worker, only if he/she contributes to economically productive, remunerative activity. The Census definition of work excludes the entire gamut of women's non-market, but productive economic activities such as collection of fire wood, fishing, hunting and production of goods and services used for own household consumption. In developing countries like India, a significant proportion of goods and services is produced for self-consumption, an activity in which the contribution

of women is very high. The Census estimates are thus not only biased against reckoning women's role, but they also under-report women's participation in economic activities.

The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) started its quinquennial sample surveys on employment and unemployment in 1972-'73. The information provided by NSSO is much broader than that of the Census. NSSO gives data on the magnitude, pattern, and structure of employment by sex. The definition of 'work' itself is broader in the NSSO estimates and includes all market as well as non-market activities (such as for self-consumption) as 'work'. Activities relating to the production of own assets such as building houses, construction of roads, wells, production of tools, and machinery are also counted as economic activity. Employment status is classified into three categories – Usual Principal Status (UPS), Current Weekly Status (CWS), and Current Daily Status (CDS). In UPS estimates, the reference period is a year. Thus, a person is classified as 'usual status employed' if he/she has been in the labour force for more than six months preceding the date of survey. The Fiftieth Round of NSS has redefined the usual status employment as 'a person who has been engaged in gainful economic activity for at least 92 of the 183 days when the person is in the labour force'. The reference period for CWS considers a person employed if he/she is employed at least for a day in that week. According to the CDS, a person is employed if he/she has worked for at least four hours a day in that week.

The NSSO also categorises workers into 'Principal' and 'Subsidiary' corresponding to the main and marginal workers respectively in the Census. The definitions used in NSSO estimates cover a large section of women labour engaged in the production of goods for self-consumption; moreover, NSSO estimates include under economic activities the services of unpaid helpers in the farm while Census treats them as a separate group. The NSSO thus covers a wide spectrum of women's activities and naturally gives higher estimates of female work participation than the Census estimates. From the 32nd round onwards NSSO introduced changes in the definition of work so as to capture the link between domestic work and economic contribution. Thus, all activities of household production for self-consumption, except the processing of primary commodities for self-consumption, are counted as work. This change has further increased the domain of female work that counts for economic activity. However, neither NSSO nor Census includes domestic, unpaid work such as child care, cooking, and other household workers in the definition of work. Moreover, both Census and NSSO surveys are based on the presumption that women are subsidiary earners. This 'male bread winner' perception largely underrates women's contribution to the household, which in fact is very important and much larger than that of male members in poor households.

Apart from NSSO and Census, information on female labour in specific sectors are provided by sources such as Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), Rural Labour Enquiries, Agricultural Wages in India, Occupational Wage Surveys of the Labour Bureau, Directory of Manufacturing Establishments (DME) Surveys, and Non-Directory Manufacturing Establishments (NDME) Surveys. All these data sources except the Labour Bureau, furnish information on the structure and pattern of women's employment in the organised sector. Data on female employment in the unorganised sector are limited. And even in the case of data on employment in the organised sector, socio-cultural and other qualitative aspects of employment are not taken into account.

The above-mentioned limitations of the data source on female employment have to be borne in mind while analysing female labour force participation in India.

### Female work participation rates in Indian States

Census data show that work participation rates of both men and women had declined during the decades from 1901 to 1971; the trends have, however, reversed to some extent since 1971. Table 3.1 shows the trends in female work participation in the principal States of India since 1961.

**Table 3.1 Female Work Participation Rate in Selected Indian States (Main workers only)**

State	1961	1971	1981	1991	Rank in 1991
Andhra Pradesh	41.31	25.84	27.01	30.05	1
Bihar	27.11	9.11	9.05	9.17	10
Gujarat	27.89	10.09	11.03	13.73	6
Haryana	13.09	8.02	6.56	6.47	12
Karnataka	32.01	14.12	18.95	22.73	5
Kerala	19.70	13.14	12.68	12.80	8
Maharashtra	38.10	21.15	23.97	26.46	2
Madhya Pradesh	43.99	20.17	22.34	22.82	4
Orissa	26.57	6.88	10.69	12.09	9
Punjab	14.19	1.19	2.26	2.79	14
Rajasthan	35.88	9.64	9.32	13.03	7
Tamil Nadu	31.28	15.16	22.36	25.12	3
Uttar Pradesh	18.14	7.10	5.39	7.45	11
West Bengal	9.43	4.74	5.80	5.06	13
India	27.93	11.87	14.10	16.60	

Source: Census of India, Various Reports

Economists argue that the upturn observed since 1971 was partly due to the gender bias in Green Revolution and the after effects of the industrial development achieved during the Second and the Third Five-Years plans. The decline in 1971 over 1961 was in fact more illusory than real. It was mainly due to changes in concepts and definitions introduced in the 1971 Census. In that Census only main workers were included in the estimates of work participation rate. Thus, a large number of women who had been primarily involved in home-based agricultural activities were excluded from the Census estimates. The 1971 Census does not give the break-up for main workers and marginal workers which we find in the 1981 and the 1991 Censuses. Hence in order to present comparable data, Table 3.1 gives the percentage of female main workers for Census years 1961-1991 for the major Indian States. We find that the pattern of decline in FWPR has been uniform in the States during the period. We may divide the States into two categories: States with FWPR greater

than or equal to 25 percent and States with FWPR lower than 25 percent. Thus in 1961 while nine States had a FWPR of 25 percent or more, the number came down drastically to just one in 1971 and 1981 and rose to 3 in 1991 (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Distribution of States by FWPR**

Year	Category I	Category II	Total
1961	9	5	14
1971	1	13	14
1981	1	13	14
1991	3	11	14

The States of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, UP, and West Bengal have a consistently low FWPR. Kerala's FWPR though low, is higher than those of more developed States like Haryana and Punjab; States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu have relatively high FWPRs.

If we add marginal workers to main workers, the FWPRs improve considerably. Table 3.3 gives figures for 1981 and 1991. But it is seen that the relative rankings in FWPR remain almost unchanged. Between 1981 and 1991 the FWPR declined in three States, (Haryana, Kerala, and Punjab). While Punjab and Haryana achieved high levels of economic growth Kerala's economic growth was much lower. Economic growth does not necessarily lead to increase in female work participation. Nor is an increase in GNP alone an adequate indicator of the increase in a State's welfare. The Human Development Index (HDI) introduced by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a more reliable index of welfare.

**Table 3.3 Female Work Participation Rate (Main+Marginal)**

States	1981	1991	Rank in 1991
Andhra Pradesh	34.19	34.32	1
Bihar	13.50	14.06	10
Gujarat	20.66	25.96	7
Haryana	12.47	11.22	12
Karnataka	25.33	29.39	5
Kerala	16.53	15.84	9
Maharashtra	30.62	33.10	2
Madhya Pradesh	30.64	32.68	3
Orissa	19.80	20.78	8
Punjab	6.15	4.40	14
Rajasthan	21.06	27.39	6
Tamil Nadu	26.51	29.88	4
Uttar Pradesh	8.06	12.32	11
West Bengal	8.06	8.35	13
India	19.70	22.30	

Source: Census of India Reports

Even HDI does not serve to indicate the position of women in society. For this purpose, a Gender-related Development Index (GDI) has been constructed by UNDP together with the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). GDI and GEM for the various Indian States have been estimated by Shiva Kumar (1996), Seetha Prabhu, et al, (1996), and Asha Mehta Kapur (1996). Kerala ranks first among the Indian States in terms of HDI and GDI. Kerala has the second lowest gender disparity too. Punjab and Haryana which have the highest per capita income rank low in terms of GDI and have large gender disparity. Thus, it becomes obvious that economic growth *per se* does not guarantee development of women.

The trends in FWPR noted on the basis of the NSS data for the same period are different from those of the Census for both the sexes. The work participation rates estimated for the various rounds of the NSS are given in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Usual Status Work Participation Rates (Principal + Subsidiary); India (%)**

Year/Round	Male			Female		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
32nd Round (1977-'78)	55.2	50.8	54.3	33.1	15.6	29.7
38th Round (1983)	54.7	51.2	53.8	34.0	15.1	21.6
43rd Round (1987-'88)	53.9	50.6	53.1	32.3	15.2	28.5
50th Round (1993-'94)	55.3	52.1	54.5	32.8	15.5	28.6
55th Round (1999-2000)	53.1	51.8	52.7	29.9	13.9	25.4

Source: NSSO Reports for various Rounds

While the difference in the work participation rates between these two data sources is comparatively low for males, for females the difference is significant. The annual rate of growth of employment in the Indian economy during 1987-'88 to 1993-'94 was 2.23 percent, while the corresponding rate for females was only 1.27 percent. Further, the sex ratio of workers which was 389 (per 1000 males) in 1987-'88 declined to 359 in 1993-'94. A striking difference is noted in the changes in rural-urban work participation rates as between females and males. The rural work participation rates are more than double the urban participation rates. While the male participation rate increased a little in the urban areas, in the rural areas the change is insignificant. But in the case of females, the work participation rates declined both in rural and urban areas. It is noted that WPR has declined in 1999-2000 for all the four categories, rural male, rural female, urban male, and urban female, from the rates reported in 1993-'94. This is quite a distressing feature and needs further investigation especially in the case of women for whom the decline is sharper. The data show that the so-called 'feminisation' process has not yet set in in the Indian economy.

## Changes in the nature of work force

Changes have occurred not only in the work participation rates for females but in the nature of the work also (Table 3.5). While the rates of the self-employed and the regular-employed have gone down in both the rural and urban areas for males, only the rates of the self-employed have declined in the case of females. The rates of the regular-employed females have remained stagnant in rural areas while they have increased in urban areas.

**Table 3.5 Rates of Employment by Type of Employment according to Sex (percent)**

Round/ Year	Males			Females		
	Self Employed	Regularly Employed	Casual Workers	Self Employed	Regularly Employed	Casual Workers
<b>Rural</b>						
1977-'78	62.8	10.6	26.6	62.1	2.8	35.1
1983	60.5	10.3	29.2	61.9	2.8	35.3
1987-'88	58.6	10.0	31.4	60.8	3.7	35.5
1993-'94	57.9	8.3	33.8	58.5	2.8	38.7
<b>Urban</b>						
1977-'78	40.4	46.4	13.2	49.5	24.9	25.6
1983	40.9	43.7	15.4	45.8	25.8	28.4
1987-'88	41.7	43.7	14.6	47.1	27.5	25.4
1993-'94	41.7	42.1	16.2	45.4	28.6	26.0

Source: NSSO (1996)

Perhaps, the most significant change in the work force has been its casualisation. The percentage of casual workers is higher for females than for males in both the rural and the urban areas; in the latter, the percentage for women is almost double that of men. Women workers in India occupy undoubtedly a much less advantageous status than men.

## Trends in female work participation rate (WPR) in India and Kerala

The long-term trend in work participation rates has been declining for both the sexes. Further, the female work participation rates have remained lower than male participation rates for the entire period.

WPRs in Kerala have remained lower than the all-India WPRs for both the sexes for the entire period exceptions being 1901 and 1931 when FWPR in Kerala remained higher than the all-India FWPR.

## Changes in the structural distribution of the work force: India and Kerala

Kerala has often been hailed as the 'land of women' because women in Kerala are believed



**Table 3.6 Work Participation Rates: Kerala and India (percent)**

Year	Kerala		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1901	56.30	32.70	61.10	31.70
1911	53.80	28.90	61.90	33.70
1921	51.10	24.50	60.50	32.60
1931	50.00	35.90	58.20	27.60
1941	NA	NA	NA	NA
1951	46.70	18.30	54.10	23.30
1961	47.20	19.70	57.20	27.90
1971	45.20	14.60	52.71	14.20
1981	44.90	16.80	52.61	19.70
1991	47.80	16.90	51.60	22.70

Source: Census of India Reports

Note: Census was not conducted fully in 1941 due to World War II

to have enjoyed, from time immemorial, a better status in society than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. The prevalence of the matriarchal system among several Hindu castes, and the high levels of literacy, education, and health of women gave them such a privilege. Yet the FWPR has remained low in Kerala.

A low female work participation rate indicates the existence of a large proportion of unemployed women in the labour force. According to an estimate made by the Department of Economics and Statistics of the Government of Kerala, nearly 61 percent of the female labour force in Kerala remains unemployed.

Table 3.7 presents the census data on the industrial classification of workers for 1981 and 1991, for Kerala and India. The structure of the work force is a reflection of the macro-processes at work in the economy. The sectoral distribution of the work force in Kerala is found to be significantly different from the all-India pattern. In 1981, the primary sector accounted for 81.6 percent of female employment at the all-India level as against 55.2 percent in Kerala. During 1981-'91, the share of the primary sector in female employment in Kerala declined from 55.2 percent to 48.6 percent. But at the all-India level the decline has been marginal, from 81.6 percent to 81.1 percent.

The percentage of male workers in Kerala in the primary sector also declined, from 50.5 percent in 1981 to 47.8 percent in 1991 as against the all-India decline from 66.3 percent to 63.4 percent during the same period. While the primary sector still remains the largest source of employment for both men and women in India, in Kerala not even half the work force is employed in the primary sector. The proportion of female agricultural labourers declined from 43.5 percent in 1981 to 36.1 percent in 1991 due partly to the fall in the area under rice cultivation and partly to the weaning away of female agricultural labourers to schemes such as IRDP.

**Table 3.7 Industrial Classification of Female Workers: 1981 and 1991 (Kerala & India)**

Category		Percentage of female workers during			
		1981		1991	
		Kerala	India	Kerala	India
1.	Cultivators	4.95 (15.67)	33.09 (43.71)	5.56 (14.22)	34.22 (39.63)
2.	Agricultural Labourers	43.55 (23.32)	46.34 (19.57)	36.09 (22.42)	44.93 (21.05)
3.	Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, etc.	6.46 (10.55)	1.83 (2.37)	6.24 (10.13)	1.60 (1.99)
4.	Mining & Quarrying	0.27 (0.97)	0.35 (0.63)	0.72 (1.07)	0.34 (0.70)
	Total Primary Sector	55.23 (50.51)	81.61 (66.28)	43.61 (47.84)	81.09 (63.37)
5a.	Manufacturing: HH Industry	7.64 (2.42)	4.57 (3.18)	5.93 (1.58)	3.53 (2.09)
5b.	Manufacturing other than HH Industry	12.47 (12.10)	3.60 (8.91)	14.78 (10.65)	3.88 (8.89)
6.	Construction	0.85 (3.67)	0.87 (1.87)	0.94 (4.91)	0.66 (2.32)
	Total Secondary Sector	20.96 (18.19)	9.04 (13.95)	21.65 (17.14)	8.07 (13.30)
7.	Trade & Commerce	3.23 (13.55)	2.04 (7.41)	4.59 (15.03)	2.25 (8.98)
8.	Transport Storage & Communication	1.60 (6.15)	0.37 (3.36)	1.50 (7.32)	0.32 (3.54)
9.	Other Services	18.98 (31.30)	6.94 (19.76)	23.65 (35.02)	8.26 (23.32)
	Total Tertiary Sector	23.81 (30.30)	9.35 (19.76)	29.74 (35.02)	10.84 (23.32)

Notes: - Figures in brackets are the corresponding percentages for males.

Source: Census of India 1991, Series, paper 2 Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

The secondary sector accounts for about one-fifth of the women in the work force in Kerala. During 1981-1991, the proportion increased marginally from about 21 percent to 22 percent. On the other hand, at the all-India level the proportion declined from nine percent in 1981 to eight percent in 1991. The proportion of women employed in the secondary sector in Kerala is much higher than the corresponding all-India figures for both men and women; the rate for females is even higher than that for men. While female employment in household industry declined from 7.6 percent to 5.9 percent during 1981-'91, employment in non-household manufacturing and construction increased from 12.5 percent to 14.8 percent. The decline in the activities of traditional household industries in Kerala such as coir,

cashew, and *beedi*, in which more than three-fourths of the employees are women, perhaps explains the decline. The high proportion of women employed in the secondary sector in Kerala is comparable to that in some of the advanced industrialised countries.

Perhaps, the most significant aspect of female employment in Kerala is the high proportion of women employed in the tertiary sector. In 1981, the tertiary sector accounted for almost a quarter of the total women employment; the proportion increased to about 30 percent in 1991. At the all-India level, the corresponding figure for 1981 was a mere 9.4 percent, which increased only marginally to 10.8 percent in 1991. The proportion of men employed in the tertiary sector also is high in the State, higher than the proportion of women employed. The growth of the service sector comprising education, health care, public administration, judiciary, and water supply and sanitation, has been remarkable in Kerala. The emergence of parallel colleges and unaided educational institutions and a large number of private hospitals since the Sixties has provided large employment opportunities to women.

In 1991, the secondary and the tertiary sectors together accounted for 51.3 percent of female employment in Kerala. At the all-India level the corresponding proportion was hardly 20 percent.

The above analysis clearly shows that the pattern and the direction of change of female employment in Kerala are significantly different from those at the all-India level. A high percentage of women in employment in the tertiary sector is characteristic of the industrialised countries of the west. But the Kerala economy is by and large industrially backward. The missing link between the two patterns could perhaps be traced to the process of marginalisation of women in the modern economy.

### **Studies on women and work in Kerala**

In the preceding discussion, we found that Kerala presents a picture quite different from that of the rest of India with respect to labour force participation of both men and women. A few studies on women and work in Kerala are available, most of them based on secondary data, either NSS or census. Very few studies have analysed female labour force participation at the micro level and its characteristics. One of the earliest studies on employment and unemployment in Kerala was the one by the Centre for Development Studies (1975). It examined the socio-economic characteristics of the unemployed, the incidence of unemployment, and the inter-relations between supply and demand factors. There are not many studies which analyse the factors and patterns. Devi (1995) tried to explain the pattern of female employment in the State using micro-level data. Kumar (1994) explained how changes in the economic structure of Kerala have reduced the demand for female labour. Eapen (1994) has observed that most of the increase in employment in Kerala has been of a casual nature and that the process of casualisation has been more severe in the case of women than of men because of their limited mobility. Frank and Chasin (1996) also observed lack of mobility of women in Kerala as a major constraint on female employment in the State. Analysing the causes for educated unemployment in the State, Mukherjee and Isaac (1994) and Mathew (1997) pointed out that rapid expansion of higher education and the

liberal supply of graduates in the State are two contributory important factors. Educated unemployment in the State was studied by Thomas (1988) and Oommen (1992). The only study on job preferences and unemployment in Kerala is that of Mathew (1997). This study, based on primary data, explains unemployment in terms of preference for salaried employment, but does not go deep into the factors that shape preferences. Devi (1996) has sought to explain the determinants of female labour force participation based on a very limited sample of 117 households from Thrissur municipal area. Gulati, Rajan, and Ramalingam (1997) discussed changes in women's labour force participation in Kerala by comparing the results of the 1981 and 1991 censuses.

## 4 Area and Population of the Study: A profile

### Profile of the sample area

The present study is based on primary data collected from 502 households in Thrissur district of Kerala - 374 households from the rural areas spread over five *grama panchayats* and 128 households from the urban area of Thrissur Municipality.

Thrissur district lying at the centre of the State has a total area of 3032 sq km. The district, which spreads over five *taluks* comprising 17 Development Blocks represents all the three topographical zones of the State - highland, midland, and lowland. The 17 Blocks consist of 98 *grama panchayats* and 7 Municipalities and are under the three-tier system of local governance. The district accounts for housing 9.41 percent of the State's population and has a density of 903 persons per sq. km which is higher than the State average of 749/sq.km (1991 census). The district's effective literacy rates in 1991 were also marginally higher than the State averages with male literacy 90.13 percent and female literacy 86.94 percent as against the State averages of 89.81 percent and 86.17 percent respectively. Perhaps, the most noteworthy feature of the district is the fact that it had the highest sex ratio in the State, 1085 females per 1000 males according to 1991 census. This is much higher than the State average of 1036 females per 1000 males in 1991. The work participation rate of the district for females, (31.96 percent) was only marginally above the corresponding State average (31.43 percent) while the male work participation rate (47.18 percent) was slightly lower than the State average (47.58 percent). The number of females who have registered with the employment exchange in Thrissur as on 31 March 1993 is 1.70 lakh, much higher than the corresponding male figure of 1.37 lakh. The corresponding figures as on 31 March 2000 were 2.1 lakh and 1.38 lakh.

The methodology used for selection of the sample was stated in detail in section 2. The major employment characteristics of the sample *panchayats* and the municipality as well as corresponding items of information for the State and all-India are furnished in Table 4.1. The sample covers a widely diversified stratum. Among the sample *panchayats* Mattathur has the largest geographical area, while Vadanappilly has the smallest in the district. Among the selected *panchayats*, Vadanappilly has the highest density of population followed closely by Kattakampal; Mattathur has the lowest density of population among the sample *panchayats*. Naturally, the density of population is higher in the Thrissur Municipal Corporation than in any of the *panchayats*. In the case of sex ratio, Vadanappilly stands much ahead of the others with 1136 females per 1000 males in 1991. This is much higher than the sex ratio of the district and the State. The high incidence of male emigration from Vadanappilly, which is one of the known 'Gulf emigration pockets' of the State, partly explains the very high sex ratio of the *panchayat*.

As we have already seen, the work participation rates for both males and females are lower in Kerala than for all-India. Among the sample *panchayats*, the male work participation rate is considerably lower than the State average only in Vadanappilly *panchayat*. In the other four *panchayats* as well as Thrissur Municipality the male work participation rates

**Table 4.1 Development Profile of the Sample**

Name of Panchayat	Area(hct)	Density of population (No)	Sex Ratio	Male WPR (%)	Female WPR (%)	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Total Female Workers (No)	Total Female Workers in secondary tertiary sector (No)	% to total in Workers
1. Adat (Puzhakkai Block)	2302	1028	1047	50.1	22.44	94.4	91.19	2757	1166	42.29
2. Kattakampal (Chowannur Block)	1687	1440	1063	49.2	15.62	96.41	90.87	1956	746	38.13
3. Mattathur (Kodakara Block)	10311	408	1065	50.3	20.89	91.22	81.75	4749	2412	50.8
4. Vadanappilly (Thalikkulam Block)	1318	1456	1136	43.42	12.97	94.86	87.74	1313	959	73.03
5. Velur (Wadakkanchery Block)	2832	450	1046	49.51	24.35	92.99	87.65	2849	708	24.85
6. Thrissur Municipality	1265	5897	1086	48.38	14.36	97.26	94.12	5578	5084	91.14
7. Thrissur District	303200	903	1085	47.18	17.94	93.77	86.94	255491	118598	46.42
8. Kerala State	3886000	749	1036	47.81	16.94	93.62	86.17	2347268	1206261	51.39
9. All India	328726300	274	929	51.56	22.73	63.90	39.31	89767563	16975046	18.91

are higher than the district and the State averages. Almost a similar pattern is observed in the case of female work participation too. Female work participation, like in the case of the male work participation, is the lowest in Vadanappilly. The inflow of Gulf remittances and the subsequent rise in the levels of living of several households may explain at least in part as to why the work participation rates for both males and females are very low in this coastal area. The female work participation rate in Velur is the highest, considerably higher than the district, the State, and even the all-India rates. In the Thrissur Municipality, female work participation rate is very low, lower than the district, State, and all-India rates.

The literacy rates for both males and females are very high in all the selected *panchayats*, the highest rate being in the municipal area. Comparison of the literacy rates in Kerala with those of all-India is not meaningful as the all-India figures are deplorably low. Kattakampal has the highest literacy rate among the selected *panchayats*; the rate is higher than of the district and the State. The male and female literacy rates in the district are only marginally higher than the corresponding State averages.

The occupational distribution of the labour force in Kerala is, as we have seen, distinctly different from the all-India pattern, both for males and females. While only 18.9 percent of the female workers in India are in the secondary and the tertiary sectors, in Kerala, the majority of women workers (51.59 percent) are employed in these two sectors. But in the case of Thrissur district the percentage of women workers in the secondary and the tertiary sector taken together is lower, only 46.42 percent. Vadanappilly stands distinctly different from others in this regard also as 73 percent of the female workers in this *panchayat* are found in the non-primary sectors. The impact of Gulf remittances on the local economy is visible in the development of trade and commerce in the *panchayat*. Thrissur municipality has 91.14 percent of its female workers reported as employed in non-primary sector activities. In an urban area in which the primary sector could have only a very limited role, this is not surprising. Being a predominantly agrarian area, Velur ranks the lowest with only less than one-fourth of its women workers employed in the non-primary sectors.

### **Profile of the sample households**

As stated earlier, the sample consists of 502 households. Seventy-four households from each *panchayat* were selected at random totalling to 374 households which forms the rural sample and 128 households from the municipality area taken as the urban sample. The 502 households together has a total population of 2509 persons (628 Urban and 1881 rural) of which 1219 are men (316 urban and 903 rural), and 1290 are women (312 urban and 978 rural). Thus, the sex ratio of the total sample works out to 1058. The sex ratio for the rural sample is 1083 and that for the urban sample 987. The average family size comes to 6 for the joint sample, 6.7 for the rural sample, and 4.9 for the urban sample.

### **Age composition of the sample**

The age composition of the sample population provides certain interesting insights (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Distribution of the Sample by Age**

Age Group	Rural			Urban			Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Below 5	56 (5.73)	66 (7.31)	122 (6.49)	14 (4.49)	20 (6.33)	34 (5.41)	156 (6.22)
5-15	172 (17.58)	184 (20.37)	356 (18.93)	44 (14.10)	43 (13.61)	87 (13.85)	443 (17.66)
15-25	192 (19.63)	141 (15.61)	333 (17.70)	48 (15.38)	51 (16.14)	99 (15.76)	432 (17.22)
<b>25-35</b>	<b>170</b> (17.38)	<b>159</b> (17.61)	<b>329</b> (17.47)	<b>65</b> (20.83)	<b>63</b> (19.94)	<b>128</b> (20.38)	<b>457</b> (18.21)
35-45	141 (14.42)	125 (13.84)	266 (14.14)	41 (13.14)	48 (15.19)	89 (14.17)	355 (14.15)
45-55	98 (10.02)	103 (11.41)	201 (10.69)	42 (13.46)	44 (13.92)	86 (13.69)	287 (11.44)
55-65	71 (7.26)	65 (7.11)	136 (7.23)	35 (11.22)	23 (7.28)	58 (9.24)	194 (7.73)
65-75	61 (6.24)	43 (47.61)	104 (5.53)	16 (5.13)	18 (5.70)	34 (5.41)	138 (5.50)
Above 75	17 (1.74)	17 (1.88)	34 (2.58)	7 (2.24)	6 (1.9)	13 (2.07)	47 (1.87)
Total	978 <b>(100.00)</b>	903 <b>(100.00)</b>	1881 <b>(100.00)</b>	312 <b>(100.00)</b>	316 <b>(100.00)</b>	628 <b>(100.00)</b>	2509 <b>(100.00)</b>

Though the number of women in the sample is higher than of men, in rural households their number is lower in the lower age groups below 15 years and the age group of 45 to 55 years. In the urban sample the number of females is lower than that of males in the age groups below 5 years, 15 to 25 years, 35 to 45 years, 45 to 55 years, and 65 to 75 years. This is a disquieting indication and raises the crucial question of where the missing women are. Fifteen percent of the persons in the sample are above the age of 55 years and nearly two percent are above 75 years. There are only marginal differences in these proportions across rural and urban areas. More than 60 percent of the population in both the sexes in rural as well as in urban areas which comes under the age group 15-55 years represents the base for the labour force.

### **Educational attainment of the persons in the sample households**

Distribution of the persons in the sample households by levels of their education is given in Table 4.3.



**Table 4.3 Distribution of the Sample by Level of Education**

Educational Level	Rural			Urban			Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Below 5	56 (5.72)	66 (7.31)	122 (6.48)	14 (4.49)	20 (6.33)	34 (5.42)	156 (6.22)
Illiterate	58 (5.93)	21 (2.33)	79 (4.47)	19 (6.08)	8 (2.53)	27 (4.30)	106 (4.22)
Primary (1-4)	175 (17.89)	203 (22.48)	378 (20.10)	42 (13.46)	32 (10.13)	74 (11.78)	452 (18.02)
Secondary (4-10)	420 (42.94)	426 (47.18)	846 (44.98)	116 (37.17)	142 (44.94)	258 (41.08)	1104 (44.00)
Above S.S.L.C	179 (18.30)	115 (12.74)	294 (15.63)	64 (20.51)	47 (14.87)	111 (17.68)	405 (16.14)
Degree	42 (4.29)	43 (4.76)	85 (4.52)	39 (12.5)	38 (12.03)	77 (12.26)	162 (6.46)
P.G	13 (1.33)	8 (0.89)	21 (1.12)	16 (5.12)	9 (2.85)	25 (3.99)	46 (1.83)
Professional	17 (1.74)	4 (0.44)	21 (1.12)	1 (0.32)	15 (4.75)	16 (2.55)	37 (1.47)
Others (Diplomas etc.)	18 (1.84)	17 (1.88)	35 (1.86)	1 (0.32)	5 (1.58)	6 (0.96)	41 (1.63)
Total	978 <b>(100.00)</b>	903 <b>(100.00)</b>	1881 <b>(100.00)</b>	312 <b>(100.00)</b>	316 <b>(100.00)</b>	628 <b>(100.00)</b>	2509 <b>(100.00)</b>

The relatively high educational status of the people of Kerala is well reflected in the profile. Only less than five percent of the population is found to be illiterate. The male-female difference in the proportion of illiterates is significant as nearly six percent of the females in rural areas and a little over six percent in the urban areas are illiterates. The corresponding male proportions are 2.3 percent in rural areas and 2.5 percent in urban areas. Illiteracy of both males and females is slightly more in the urban areas than in the rural areas indicating the fact that in Kerala rural-urban distinctions are not very meaningful in the matter of education. Nearly 28 percent of the people in the sample have education above SSLC; the proportion of women in this category is much higher in both the rural and the urban areas. Similarly, the proportion of postgraduates is also higher among females than among males in rural as well as in urban areas. While the proportion of professional females is much higher than that of males in rural areas, the reverse is the case of urban areas. Though variation exists with regard to sex and place, the general picture that emerges is that of a highly educated population.

#### **Distribution of the sample by religion**

The distribution of the sample households by religion is given in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Distribution of the Sample Households by Religion**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Hindu	260 (69.52)	85 (66.40)	345 (68.73)
Christian	97 (25.94)	24 (18.75)	121 (24.10)
Muslim	17 (4.54)	19 (14.85)	36 (7.17)
Total	374 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	502 (100.0)

The majority of the respondents (68.73 percent) are Hindus. While 24.1 percent are Christians, Muslims come to only 7.17 percent.

#### **Activity status of the sample population**

Activity status distribution of the sample population is shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5 Activity Status of the Sample Population**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Rural</b>			<b>Urban</b>			<b>Total</b>		
	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	225 (23.0)	520 (57.6)	745 (39.6)	53 (16.9)	193 (61.1)	246 (39.1)	278 (21.5)	713 (58.5)	991 (39.5)
Unemployed	381 (38.9)	66 (7.3)	447 (23.7)	144 (46.1)	22 (6.9)	166 (26.4)	525 (40.7)	88 (7.2)	613 (24.4)
Students	256 (26.2)	249 (27.6)	505 (26.8)	69 (22.1)	74 (23.4)	143 (22.7)	325 (25.2)	323 (26.5)	648 (25.8)
Dependents	116 (11.9)	68 (7.5)	184 (19.8)	46 (14.7)	27 (8.5)	73 (11.6)	162 (12.5)	95 (7.8)	253 (10.1)
Total	978 <b>(100.0)</b>	903 <b>(100.0)</b>	1881 <b>(100.0)</b>	312 <b>(100.0)</b>	316 <b>(100.0)</b>	628 <b>(100.0)</b>	1290 <b>(100.0)</b>	1219 <b>(100.0)</b>	2509 <b>(100.0)</b>

The worker-population ratio for women is 23 percent in rural areas and 16.9 percent in urban areas, as against 57.6 percent and 61.1 percent respectively for men. Among females, full-time students constitute 26.2 percent in the rural areas and 22.1 percent in the urban areas. The corresponding proportions for males are marginally higher. Dependents are defined as those who are neither students nor workers (too young or too old, or physically

or mentally handicapped). The percentage of women dependents is higher in both the rural and the urban areas than men dependents. In the urban sample the difference is much higher. A possible explanation is the higher sex ratio in the population favouring women and the higher life expectancy for women in general in Kerala.

### **Distribution of households by employment status of women**

The distribution of households by employment status of women is given in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6 Distribution of Sample Households by Employment Status of Women**

<b>Employee Status</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	168 (44.92)	42 (32.81)	210 (41.83)
Unemployed	206 (55.08)	86 (67.19)	292 (58.17)
Total	374 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	502 (100.00)

Nearly 42 percent of the total households have at least one female worker. The proportion of households with no female worker is relatively much higher in the urban area (67.2 percent) than in the rural area (55.1 percent). This is in conformity with the general pattern of female work participation in the State.

It is also found that out of 374 rural households, about one-fifth are female-headed households and out of the 128 households in the urban area nearly one-fourth come under this category. It is often held in gender studies that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households due to women's income and time constraints on account of non-market activities. The extent to which this proposition is true with respect to the present sample is analysed in the next section.

The levels of living of the households may be understood from the per capita income figures given in Table 4.7.

Nearly one-half of the households in the sample have a per capita monthly income of less than Rs 600. In the rural sample the corresponding proportion is marginally higher (52 percent) while in the urban sample it is much lower (41 percent). More than 80 percent of the households in the rural areas and nearly 77 percent in the urban areas have a monthly per capita income of less than Rs 900. The proportions of household which have a monthly per capita income of Rs 1500 or more come to nearly 7 percent in the rural areas and 8.6 percent in the urban area. Thus, wide inequalities exist in the levels of living of the sample households.

Table 4.8 shows the distribution of the sample households by ownership status of their houses.

**Table 4.7 Distribution of Households by Monthly per capita Income**

<b>Per capita Monthly Income Class (Rs)</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
0-100	0 (0)	1 (0.78)	1 (0.20)
100-300	25 (6.68)	5 (3.91)	30 (5.98)
300-600	169 (45.19)	46 (35.94)	215 (42.83)
600-900	103 (27.54)	36 (28.13)	139 (27.69)
900-1200	35 (9.36)	15 (11.72)	50 (9.96)
1200-1500	21 (5.61)	14 (10.94)	35 (6.97)
1500-1800	7 (1.87)	4 (3.13)	11 (2.19)
1800-2000	11 (2.94)	5 (3.91)	16 (3.18)
Above 2000	3 (0.80)	2 (1.56)	5 (0.99)
Total	374 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	502 (100.00)
Mean	663.77	731.25	730.78

**Table 4.8 Distribution of Sample Households by Type of Ownership**

<b>Type of Ownership</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Own	360 (95.26)	115 (89.84)	475 (94.6)
Rented	14 (3.74)	13 (10.16)	27 (5.38)
Total	374 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	502 (100.00)

Nearly 95 percent of the households own houses, the difference in the proportions with respect to rural urban samples being marginal. The proportion of rented houses comes to 10 percent in the urban areas while it is only about four percent in the rural areas.

The changing pattern of the lifestyle of the population in the sample is reflected in the information furnished in Table 4.9 on the distribution of households by type of family.

**Table 4.9 Distribution of the Sample Household by the Nature of Family**

<b>Nature of family</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Joint Family	64 (17.11)	16 (12.5)	80 (15.94)
Nuclear Family	310 (82.89)	112 (87.5)	422 (84.06)
Total	374 (100.00)	128 (100.00)	502 (100.00)

The joint family system was very much prevalent in Kerala at least until the middle of the last century. Today even in the communities of Nairs and Muslims (of North Malabar) the system has broken down and single nuclear families have become the order of the day.

## 5. Gender, Work, and Household Relations

Participation of women in economic activities outside home has an important bearing on gender relations within the household. The social influences of women's work are also quite extensive. Work opportunities outside home reduce the economic dependence of women on men and in turn, increase her economic command within the family. The inter-relationship among economic power, gender, and household variables started to receive the attention of research from the early 1980s only and that too mainly from sociologists.

Women's economic power (defined as control of key economic resources such as income, property, and other means of production) relative to that of men is posited as the most important dependent variable affecting gender relations at the household level. There exist at least three important gender-based distortions in resource allocation (i) discrimination against women in access to resources and services, (ii) unpaid work that women are obliged to undertake in social reproduction and family maintenance, and (iii) unequal exchange within households in terms of patterns of work and income distribution, reflecting conflict as well as co-operation (Elson and Mc Gee, 1995).

The conventional theory of the household as portrayed in the writings of neo-classical economists treats the household as a socio-economic, unified unit of consumption and production. The welfare of the individual is mediated through the household which has a joint utility function. The household head serves as a proxy for collective utility maximisation of the household. The gender division of labour within the household critically defines women's and men's roles, and relations within the household are characterised by sharing of income and resources. The feminist approach criticises the neo-classical model of the household as the 'black box' model i.e., the contents of the black box do not matter for the neo-classical economists following the tradition of Becker's 'new home economics' (Becker, 1981). A different perspective of gender relations within the household is seen in the recent works of Sen (1990), Seiz (1991), Lockwood (1992), Agarwal (1992), Feber and Nelson (1993), and Beneria (1995). In their view, what goes within the family does matter; who works and who brings in income has an important bearing on the household's decision-making. Independent income-earning opportunities increase the women's decision-making power within the household and through that streamlines intra-household gender relations.

Several studies conducted in developing countries, especially Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, have shown that relative economic power of males vs. females is the most important factor that affects the overall gender relations within the household. The greater the women's relative economic power, the greater is her control over a variety of 'life options' including marriage, divorce, and overall household authority including various types of decisions. When a woman's relative economic power increases her self-confidence and sense of 'self' increases. Her role in household decision-making also tends to grow. On the other hand, a decline in her relative economic power often portends quite rapid decrease in her relative power position in household decision-making. In short, there is a whole chain of consequences that results from women's labour force participation and earning of income. Not only does economic power increase a woman's status in the household in the gender hierarchy but it increases the well-being of the family as well. Women spend income in ways different from

those of men; they spend more for the purchase of goods for their children and for the sustenance of the family. Mencher (1988) in her study of female-male contributions in 20 villages of South India found that women's earnings were not only essential for the survival of the family, but also that the proportion of the contribution of females to the family's survival was much higher than of males. Even when men and women have equal incomes. Consequently, increase in women's income translates more into better child health and nutrition status (World Bank, 1989). In the following sections we analyse how women's work shapes the gender relations within the households under the present study.

### **Female income as a share of total family income**

Economic independence enhances the social standing of a woman in the household and the society and gives her greater role in decision-making at home (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Blumberg, 1991; Dreze and Sen, 1995).

Studies on women's contribution to household income in Third World countries have also demonstrated that women's earned income and their ability to stretch it and other resources are vital to the survival of many households in these countries. This is because women generally withhold less of their earnings for personal use than men do. In families which are well off this is not a crucial problem, but for most families in developing countries, which live on the verge of survival, this may have serious consequences, especially at times of crisis when women are temporarily pushed out of work.

**Table 5.1 Share of Female Income in Family's Total Income**

<b>Percentage share of Female Income to Total Family Income</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Below10	12	5.20
10-20	18	7.80
20-30	44	19.00
30-40	23	9.90
40-50	31	13.40
50-60	41	17.80
60-70	22	9.50
70-80	15	6.50
80-90	13	5.60
90-100	12	5.20
Total	231	100.00

Table 5.1 gives data on income of women as percentage of total family income for the 231 households in the sample which have female earners. In nearly 45 percent of the households, women's income constitutes more than 50 percent of the total family incomes; in about 17 percent the share is more than 70 percent; and in nearly 5 percent it is as high as more than 90 percent. In seven households, women's income constitutes the sole source. Thus, it is

clear that women's income is a crucial component of the family income of the households in our study. A better understanding of the role of female income in the sustenance of the family is provided by data given in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 Male/Female Earnings Vs Contributions: Rural and Urban**

	Wife's			Husband's			Earnings W/H	Contribution W/H
	Earnings	Contribution	C/E	Earnings	Contribution	C/E		
Rural 1	586	534	0.91	778	522	0.67	0.75	1.02
Rural 2	1132	883	0.78	896	1365	0.71	0.59	0.65
Rural 3	2706	1877	0.69	3923	2785	0.71	0.97	0.67
Urban 1	623	548	0.88	884	609	0.69	0.70	0.90
Urban 2	1331	1011	0.76	2176	1544	0.71	0.61	0.65
Urban 3	3452	2037	0.59	4931	2514	0.51	0.70	0.81
Mean			0.86			0.68	0.62	0.84

- 1 - Total family income less than Rs 1500 p.m.
- 2 - Total family income between Rs 1500 Rs 5000.
- 3 - Total family income above Rs 5000 p.m.

The data given in Table 5.2 have been estimated by following an adaptation of Mencher's methodology (Mencher, 1988). We have divided the sample into three categories on the basis of monthly income. We find that though the absolute amounts contributed by males for family's sustenance may be higher, the proportion of male contribution to male earnings is always much lower than that of females in all the income classes. The average earning contribution ratio for women comes to 0.86 while it is 0.68 for men. The gender disparity is clear when we look at the earnings to contribution ratio for women and men. While the wife-husband earning ratio is only 0.62, the contribution ratio is 0.84, a clear indication of the gender disparity not only in earnings but in the contribution to family maintenance also. These findings are in general, in conformity with those of Mencher.

### **Economic independence and status of women in the household**

Does the larger economic contribution of women enhance their standing in the household and give them greater role in decision-making? Blumberg (1991) who analysed three case studies of Nepal, Kenya, and Guatemala (all Third World countries) argues that in all the case studies referred, a positive relationship was found to exist between women's independent income and their role in household decision-making. Roldan (1988) also reported that women gained self-esteem when they started earning independent income. In order to get a better picture of the inter-relationship between gender, work, and household status, we tried three different methods: (i) getting a direct response from the employed women as to whether economic independence has improved their position in the gender hierarchy, (ii) getting responses from both the employed and the unemployed women with regard to their role in household decision-making in key areas and testing the association between decision-making



and employment status on the basis of  $\chi^2$  test, and (iii) estimating a status score for both the employed and the unemployed women on the basis of their response to five strategic questions indicating status in the household and comparing their responses for the two categories of women.

### **Independent income and status in the household**

In the ‘gender-differentiated’ internal economy of the household, greater economic power for women, consequent upon participation in paid labour force is believed to enhance their control over household decisions and thereby to improve their status in the household. In this section, the response of the women workers in the sample to the question whether income-earning has improved their status in the household, is analysed. Table 5.3 gives the distribution of the sample according to their views on changes in status. The majority of the respondents, 63.5 percent in rural areas and 76.3 percent in urban areas, feel that work outside home and independent income has improved their status in the household.

**Table 5.3 Distribution of the Sample Women according to their response on Change in Status (%)**

<b>Change in status</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>
Increase in status	63.45	76.28
No change in status	28.69	20.53
Decrease in status	7.86	3.19
Total	100.00	100.00

Nearly 29 percent of the employed women in the rural areas and 21 percent in urban areas, however, feel that independent income has not contributed to improvement in their status. More surprising is the fact that nearly eight percent in the rural areas and three percent in urban areas feel that work outside home has decreased their status in the household. Whether they have understood ‘status’ in the right sense or not is unclear.

### **Independent income and household decision-making**

In most of the literature on marital power, a pet area of interest of sociologists in the United States has been women’s independent income and household decision-making power. As stated earlier, Blumberg (1991) reporting with the evidence of three case studies of Nepal, Kenya, and Guatemala found that the relationship was positive. Covering 279 households in eight villages in Nepal, Acharya and Bennett (1981) found that women’s involvement in market activities increased their power within the household reckoned in terms of their input in all aspects of household decision-making. At the same time, women confined to domestic and subsistence work alone, experienced decline in power. Hanger and Moris (1973) in their study of two Kenyan farming villages Mwea and Nembure found that Mwea women had distinctly lower power in family-decision-making where women were greatly dependent on their husbands for household expenditure who received the entire income from the programme of farm management. In Nembure, on the other hand, where women farmed their own plots, traded their surplus on their own account, and even supplied a

major share of the families' food requirements, women enjoyed a greater role in decision-making. Similarly the Guatemala study of Blumberg (1985) provides evidence that the women's substantial earnings brought them leverage at home. These studies and many others posit that greater economic power enhances the role of women in household decision-making.

We collected information on the role of women in decision-making separately for a few important areas such as food, clothing, entertainment, purchase of time-saving gadgets and other consumer durables, size of family and rearing of children and savings, borrowings, and investment. Simple 'yes' or 'no' answer type questions were asked to female respondents in the sample households. The answer 'yes' was taken as indicating role in decision-making and 'no' as having no role. The number of respondents answering 'yes' and 'no' in both the categories of respondents, workers, and non-workers, were calculated and results tabulated in two-way contingency tables. The statistical test using  $\chi^2$  statistic was used to test the hypothesis that there is no difference as between working women and non-working women in their role in household decision-making. The results are given in the following sections. It is interesting to note that in six out of seven areas of decision-making examined, the hypothesis was rejected at one percent level of significance indicating the decisive role of working women in household decision-making.

### Decisions regarding food

In most families, both with female earners and without female earners, an important area in household decision-making is food. Decisions on how much expenditure to incur on various items of food and what type of food to cook are in fact the most important recurring decisions that every household has to take. By 'type of food' all related questions such as the use of bakery products and fast food are included. The responses in this regard are given in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4 Distribution of Women by Roles in Decision-making Regarding Food**

Category	Yes	No	Total
Working women	262	16	278
Non-working women	420	105	525
Total	682	121	803

$\chi^2 = 10.28$  (significant of 1% level of significance)

The majority of the respondents reported that they have a role in decision-making regarding food. But we find that the proportion having role in decisions is higher among working women than among non-working women. Several empirical studies in the US have postulated that households with women earners spend more on food away from home (Sexauer, 1979), Kinsely (1983), and Mc Cracken and Brandt (1987)). In the West, compulsions of time and the independent economic status of wives have been responsible for the wives to occupy a dominant role in decision-making regarding food. Since Kerala with high female literacy and educational levels, compares well with the developed West in terms of social development,

it is no wonder that women have a dominant role in decisions regarding food. But the  $c^2$  test clearly indicates that the role is far greater for working women than for non-working women.

### Decisions regarding clothing

Like in the case of food, decisions on matters relating to clothing are recurring decisions which households take. Our data show that working women have greater edge over non-workers in decision-making in this matter (Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Distribution of Women by Roles in Decisions on Clothing**

Category	Yes	No	Total
Working Women	244	34	278
Non-working women	294	231	252
Total	538	265	803

$c^2 = 13.27$  (Significant at 1% Level)

The  $\chi^2$  value is found to be 22.83, significant at one percent level of significance.

### Decisions regarding entertainment

In fast-growing urban societies in which traditional social relations are no more significant, entertainments like movies and cultural programmes are important in influencing gender relations within the household. The responses of the respondents in our study in this regard are given in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6 Distribution of Women by Roles in Decision-making Regarding Entertainments**

Category	Role in Decision		
	Yes	No	Total
Working women	234	44	278
Non-working women	320	205	525
Total	554	249	803

$c^2 = 13.27$  (Significant at 1% level)

Working women are seen to play a larger role in decision-making on entertainment. It is interesting to note that not a single household reported having no expenditure on entertainment. This is not surprising in a State like Kerala, which incurs, according to the latest round of the NSS, the highest per capita expenditure on entertainment among the States in India.

### Decisions on acquisition of modern household gadgets

Decisions on time-saving modern household gadgets are a non-recurring decision which is taken only on rare occasions in the life time of a family. Moreover, such items are purchased

more by middle class and upper class families than by poor families. Thus only 698 women responded to this question (Table 5.7).

A good proportion of the respondents have reported that they have a say in this matter; but the proportion is much higher among working women. The value of  $\chi^2$  is as high as 25.53.

**Table 5.7 Distribution of Women by Roles in Decision-making on Acquisition of Modern Household Gadgets**

Category	Yes	No	Total
Working Women	231	23	254
Non-working Women	275	169	444
Total	506	192	698

$\chi^2 = 25.53$  (Significant at 1% level)

#### **Decisions regarding family size and bringing up of children**

Decisions regarding number of children a couple would have, the time interval between a child and the next, the age at which to send children to school, the types of school in which children should be enrolled and discrimination against any child are important in a household. Also they have an important bearing on the gender relations within the household. The responses in this regard are given in Table 5.8.

Only 703 women responded to this question. The percentage of reporting 'yes' is much higher among working women than among non-working women. While 274 out of 278 working women responded to this question only 429 out of 525 non-working women (81.71 percent) responded to this question. As was found in the other areas of decision-making in the household, in this respect also it is working women who play a much larger role. The value  $\chi^2$  is found to be as high as 29.07.

**Table 5.8 Distribution of Women by Roles in Decision-making on Family Size and Bringing up of Children**

Category	Role in Decisions		
	Yes	No	Total
Working Women	231	43	274
Non-working women	248	181	429
Total	479	224	703

$\chi^2 = 29.07$  (Significant at 1% level)

#### **Decisions regarding savings**

It is often argued that men as a general rule spend more while women save more. This is all the more true in the case of middle and lower income classes. Thus, the decisions regarding saving have strong gender content. How much to save and what type of savings to make are

the main questions on which decisions are made. In this case also all the households did not respond as the question is irrelevant in the case of households with very low incomes (Table 5.9).

**Table 5.9 Distribution of Women by Response to Decision Regarding Savings**

Category	Yes	No	Total
Working women	241	27	268
Non-working women	256	157	413
Total	497	184	681

$c^2 = 27.71$  (Significant at 1% level)

The  $\chi^2$  value of 27.71 shows clearly that working women have a more dominant role to play in decision-making in this respect also.

### Decision regarding borrowing

Most families, irrespective of their economic position, are forced to borrow on certain occasions. To borrow or not to borrow, from whom to borrow, and how much to borrow are decisions which a household makes from time to time (Table 5.10).

**Table 5.10 Distribution of Women Based on the Response to Decision regarding Borrowing**

Category	Yes	No	Total
Working women	103	175	278
Non-working women	168	357	525
Total	271	532	803

$c^2 = 1.34$  (No significant at 1% level)

Perhaps, the only area in which working women do not have a greater role is decision-making on borrowing. It is surprising to note that the majority of women in both the categories reported that they did not have any role in decisions taken on borrowing. Statistically also (since  $c^2$  value of 1.34 is not significant at one percent level) there seems to be little significant association between women's employment status and decision-making on borrowing. This is quite unexpected and contrary to the findings of some of the western studies.

The foregoing analysis on the role of women workers in household decision-making clearly shows that the traditional gender hierarchy in household relations has undergone tremendous change. Autonomous decision making by the male head or other male members, has given place to women participating actively in household decision-making. Also, the results unambiguously confirm that working women with independent incomes have a decisively greater role in household decision-making than non-working/non-earning women.

In the next section we estimate status scores for both the categories of women on the basis of their response to a set of five questions, which are then used to evaluate the influence of independent income on gender relations in the household.

### **Influence of women’s income on gender relations**

It has been well documented that relative female economic power is the most important independent variable that affects overall gender stratification in the household. And, the greater a woman’s relative economic power, the greater her control over her own life. Moreover, many studies of ‘women and development’ report that women’s self-esteem grows when they begin earning independent income. Keeping these general observations in mind, we have sought answers to the following questions which we hope, would capture the broad contours of the socio-economic status of women respondents in the sample.

- (i) Do you feel that you have an equal status with your husband in household decision-making?
- (ii) Do you have independent access to income?
- (iii) Is your movement outside home unrestricted?
- (iv) Do you feel that employment outside home has increased your status in the household / do you feel that your status would improve if you get a job?
- (v) Are you happy with the existing lifestyle?

For each positive answer 20 scores were given and a total score of 60 or more is considered indicative of high status; 0-20 shows low status; and 20-60 medium status. The status scores thus assigned are just crude indicators of the status. Rural urban differences in status as also the intra-income class variations in status are not considered here. The percentage distribution of women on the basis of status scores is given in Table 5.11.

The grading on the basis of status scores indicates the better status of working women. More than one-half of them fall into the high status category as against only less than one-fourth in the case of non-working women. The difference between working status and non-working status is the minimum in the medium status category. But the most striking difference, perhaps, is that while only about one-tenth of the working women come in the low status category, more than one-third of the non-working women fall into this category. Thus, the status scores and the grading based on them clearly indicate the better status of working women than that of non-working women.

**Table 5.11 Distribution of Women on the Basis of the Status Grades (percent)**

<b>Status Grade</b>	<b>Employed Women</b>	<b>Unemployed Women</b>
High	51.4	24.6
Medium	37.8	44.3
Low	10.8	34.1
Total	100.00	100.00

## Double roles and double burdens

Is this 'better status' entirely and always true? In other words, are working women enjoying this 'better status' without 'costs'?

Ever since Boserup first noted the "double whammy" whereby both planned and unplanned development were likely to increase Third World women's work load, researchers have provided considerable empirical documentation of the 'double burden' faced by working women around the world. After travelling extensively through the villages of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, Jean Dreze (1997) wrote, "one of the most vivid impressions I retain from this experience concerns inequalities of work between women and men. Specifically I was struck by the fact that everywhere women seemed to be working most of the time. In short, women seemed to bear a highly disproportionate share of the overall burden of work in rural areas". This observation would seem true in urban areas also. Work-related inequalities, which have far-reaching implications for gender relations within the household, are not adequately reflected in national labour statistics. Housework (domestic duties) has been regarded as the responsibility of women, whether working or non-working. The type and extent of housework varies across societies and regions and across income groups within the same society. Several factors contribute to variations in housework performed by women, the predominant among them being the socio-demographic and economic status of the household and the cultural norms that shape the division of labour within the household.

The discrepancy in the total hours of work performed by employed and unemployed women is brought out by the data given in Table 5.12. The time devoted to work by women has been grouped into five categories: (i) paid work outside home; (ii) household work (cooking, cleaning, etc); (iii) child care, banking, and marketing; (iv) caring for animals, gardening, etc; and (v) recreation (reading, watching TV, etc). Since some of these activities are done simultaneously (e.g., cooking and child care) the data on the time spent for each category of work is not likely to be accurate.

**Table 5.12 Hours of Work of Women by Employment Status**

Hours of Work per day	Employed Women (%)	Unemployed Women (%)
0-2	0.00	7.84
2-5	4.55	43.14
5-8	4.55	35.29
8-11	22.72	11.76
11-14	60.61	1.96
14 and above	7.57	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00
Mean	11.36	4.80

The differences in the work burden between employed and unemployed women seem to be appallingly wide. Basically participation in work force influences the total hours of work of a women and her time allocation pattern. The total number of hours of work of employed women is on the average almost two-and-a-half that of the unemployed women. While 68 percent of the employed women work more than 11 hours a day (8 percent working more than 14 hours), more than half the unemployed women, work only less than five hours a day. More than 86 percent of them work only for less than eight hours a day. The very few unemployed women who reported working more than 11 hours a day (about 2 percent) mostly came from joint families with large number of members. Thus we find that paid work outside the home does not reduce the family burden and responsibilities of women. On the other hand, it increases their work burden enormously without corresponding increases in material benefits as the majority of the sample reported (76.89 percent). Only those who were in the higher income groups could afford to have domestic help. Thus, for the majority of the employed women, employment outside the home resulted in a 'double burden'.

### **Female-headed households**

The analysis of the inter-relationship between gender, work, and household relations will not be complete without an enquiry into the phenomenon of female-headed households in the sample.

Most of the literature on gender and welfare in developing countries suggest that female-headed households are one of the key target groups to be dealt with under anti-poverty programmes. This is because of the common understanding that female-headed households are less well off than male-headed households. There exists some evidence of the linkage between poverty and female-headedness in India too (Visaria, 1985; Parthasarathy, 1982). Female-headed households are less well off than male-headed households due to their lesser control over resources, lower incomes, and lower levels of literacy and education (Agarwal, 1986, 1995; Varghese, 1990; Lingam, 1994). But some recent assessment found little evidence of female-headed households being significantly poorer than male-headed households (Dreze, 1990; Dreze and Srinivasan, 1990, 1995). In the face of these two contrasting views, analysis of micro-level data of the kind used in this study becomes relevant and useful for a definitive understanding of the relationship in question.

In the collection of data on female-headed households, we followed the conventional definition of 'headship' as the household member on whom falls the chief responsibility for the economic maintenance of the family. The question of headship was asked separately to both the male and the female adult members and we did not find any discrepancy between their responses. However, *de facto* female heads of households, from which the male partner was absent temporarily on migration, account for two percent of the total sample (rural and urban combined). The distribution of female-headed households is given in Table 5.13. More than one-fifth of the sample households are found to be female-headed.

The proportion of female-headed households is marginally lower in the rural areas (20.6 percent) than in the urban area (24.2 percent). Vadanappilly *panchayat* reported the highest



**Table 5.13 Female-headed Households by Residence Status in the Sample**

Area	No. of Female Headed Households	Total No: of Households Selected in the sample	%of Female Headed Households to total
Adat <i>panchayat</i>	9	75	12.0
Kattakampal <i>panchayat</i>	16	74	21.62
Mattathur <i>panchayat</i>	17	74	22.97
Vadanappilly Panachayat	19	77	24.67
Velur <i>panchayat</i>	16	74	21.62
Total Rural	77	374	20.59
Thrissur Municipality (Urban)	31	128	24.22
Grand Total	108	502	21.51

percentage of female-headed households (24.7 percent). Vadanappilly, a coastal village of the district, is famous for its high incidence of Gulf migration. Therefore, there are many *de facto* female heads of households in Vadanappilly. Adat *panchayat* had the lowest proportion of female-headed households in the sample. Nearly two-thirds of the female-headed households are headed by the seniormost women members in them, many of whom are widowed or single. Thus, only one-third of the female heads of households have spouses present. Contrastingly, in male-headed households, 72 percent of male heads have their spouses with them. This is not surprising in Kerala where the life expectancy for females is higher than that of males and wives are younger in age than their husbands. There are several other differences also between male-headed and female-headed households (Table 5.14).

**Table 5.14 Distribution of Households by Economic Characteristics according to Sex of the Head**

Household Characteristics	Male-headed	Female-headed
Mean size	5.8	3.5
Own house (%)	91.7	76.4
Literate (%)	92.7	88.5
Unemployed (%)	18.3	21.2
Per capita Household Monthly income (in Rs.)	792.8	621.6
Number of Dependents (no.)	0.9	1.2

Though the per capita income levels of female-headed households are lower, it is not clear whether all of them are poor. A detailed discussion of poverty of female-headed households is beyond the scope of the present study.

The foregoing analysis of the inter-relationship between gender, work, and household relations clearly indicate that work outside home and the consequent economic independence improve status of, though often it results in 'double burden', for women.

## 6. Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation in Kerala: Some evidence from the micro level

The development experience of Kerala has received worldwide acclaim in recent years for its unique features. The State has a very high quality of life coexisting with relatively low levels of per capita income. The development experience of Kerala clearly validates the proposition that gender-related development is different from the conventional concepts of economic development. Kerala ranks the highest among the Indian States in terms of the gender-related development index (GDI) and in terms of the gender empowerment measure (GEM). Table 6.1 gives the GDI and HDI (Human Development Index) for 15 Indian States (Shivakumar, 1996). GDI is computed as a composite index of female life expectancy, female adult literacy, and income earned by females (Adjusted real DDP per capita). According to the method used to compute GDI, GDI falls when disparity between the achievements of men and women increases; gender disparity is measured as

$$\text{Gender Disparity} = \frac{\text{HDI} - \text{GDI}}{\text{HDI}} \times 100$$

**Table 6.1 GDI\* and HDI\*\* for selected Indian States**

States	HDI	GDI	Gender disparity
Andhra Pradesh	0.400 (9)	0.371 (8)	7.3
Assam	0.379 (10)	0.347 (10)	8.4
Bihar	0.354 (13)	0.306 (14)	13.6
Gujarat	0.467 (5)	0.437 (3)	6.3
Haryana	0.489 (4)	0.370 (9)	24.3
Karnataka	0.448 (7)	0.417 (5)	6.9
Kerala	0.603 (1)	0.565 (1)	6.2
Madhya Pradesh	0.349 (14)	0.312 (2)	10.7
Maharashtra	0.523 (3)	0.429 (2)	6.0
Orissa	0.373 (11)	0.329 (11)	11.9
Punjab	0.529 (2)	0.424 (4)	19.8
Rajasthan	0.356 (12)	0.309 (13)	13.0
Tamil Nadu	0.438 (8)	0.402 (6)	8.3
Uttar Pradesh	0.348 (15)	0.293 (15)	15.9
West Bengal	0.459 (6)	0.399 (7)	13.1
India	0.423	0.388	8.2

\* Gender-related Development Index; \*\* Human Development Index

Source: A. K. Shivakumar, "UNDP's Gender Related Development Index A computation for Indian States", Economic and Political Weekly, 6 April 1996.

Figures in brackets are ranks.

Next to Kerala comes Punjab in HDI ranking; but it is only fourth in terms of GDI ranking. Maharashtra comes third in HDI but second in GDI. But Uttar Pradesh ranks the lowest in terms of both GDI and HDI. It is clear that overall human development has a positive correlation with gender development. In the matter of gender disparity, Kerala ranks only second while Maharashtra ranks first though the difference is marginal. It is surprising to note that States like Haryana and Punjab which have very high levels of per capita income have the highest levels of gender disparity. The BIMARU States and West Bengal also have high levels of gender disparity. In the States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala, gender inequalities are the lowest. Thus, it becomes clear that economic development *per se* does not guarantee gender equality.

Another, and an even better, index of gender-related development is provided by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM); a measure of the degree of participation of women in economic, political, and professional activities. The relevant indices taken are per capita income, women's share of jobs in the professional, technical, managerial and administrative categories, and their share of parliamentary seats (Mehta, 1996). The scores of GEM ranks obtained by the 15 States in India are given below.

**Table 6.2 Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Ranks for Indian States**

State	GEM	Rank
Andhra Pradesh	0.51	8
Assam	0.46	11
Bihar	0.45	12
Gujarat	0.56	3
Haryana	0.53	6
Karnataka	0.55	4
Kerala	0.63	1
Madhya Pradesh	0.48	9
Maharashtra	0.60	2
Orissa	0.47	10
Punjab	0.54	5
Rajasthan	0.48	9
Tamil Nadu	0.52	7
Uttar Pradesh	0.47	10
West Bengal	0.53	6

Source: Mehta Asha Kapoor "Recasting Indues for Developing Countries: A Gender Empowerment Measure", Economic and Political Weekly, 26 October.

Like in the case of GDI, Kerala ranks first among the Indian States with respect to GEM. Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka come next in that order. Both GDI and GEM into account, however, several factors that have a direct bearing on the welfare of human beings such as per capita food grains production, extent of landlessness, and female unemployment rates. On the basis of the norms of per capita requirement of food laid down by Indian

Council of Medical Research (ICMR), namely 370 gm per day, Shah (1997) has showed that States having below 150 kg food grain production per capita per annum are poor. Kerala ranks the lowest among the Indian States with a per capita food production of 37 kg per annum. No other Indian State has a two digit food production figure. Shah also examined the extent of landlessness in the Indian States and found that Kerala's position is below the average for India. Similarly Kerala has the highest female unemployment rates in the country according to various rounds of NSSO surveys on employment and unemployment. The results of the 50th round on unemployment are presented in Table 6.3. Kerala's female unemployment position is seen to be much more severe than that of any other State. Except Assam, all the States have female unemployment rate of 3 or less per 1000. Kerala's female unemployment figures are several times higher than the all-India average in the rural sector.

**Table 6.3 Number of Unemployed Females per 1000 females by Residence Status**

State	Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	1	7
Assam	13	32
Bihar	1	7
Gujarat	1	6
Haryana	2	5
Himachal Pradesh	1	1
Karnataka	2	11
Kerala	26	47
Madhya Pradesh	2	6
Maharashtra	2	8
Orissa	2	10
Punjab	3	5
Rajasthan	1	1
Tamil Nadu	3	17
Uttar Pradesh	1	1
West Bengal	3	31
All India	3	10

Source: NSSO - "Key Results on Employment Unemployment" - NSS 50th Round.

The unemployment figures for women become all the more significant since the percentages of women engaged in domestic duties, in free collection of goods (category 92 and 93) and given to beggary and prostitution (category 97) are very high. Kerala, the State having the highest rate of female unemployment, is also the State having the largest proportion of women in rural areas engaged in domestic duties (33.96 percent). However, the percentage of females in the other two categories is much less in Kerala than in other States. Surprisingly, this State which has the highest female literacy and education has the second highest female suicide rate in India following West Bengal. The question whether the high female suicide rate is the consequence of the high (and growing) female unemployment in the State still remains unaddressed. It has been widely discussed and well-documented that the unemployment position in Kerala for both the sexes is the highest in the country and that the

position of females in this regard is worse than that of males. In the light of these contradictions an attempt is made in the following sections to analyse the factors that determine female labour force participation at the micro level.

### **Female employment pattern at the micro-level**

It is often held that employment status is the key factor that determines the overall socio-economic status of a woman. Table 6.4 gives the distribution of the sample population on the basis of employment status. The data given in this Table is in fact derived from Table 4.5 which gives the activity status of the entire sample. Of the 803 women respondents who comprise the labour force in the sample, only 278 (34.6 percent) are gainfully employed. The rural-urban difference in this regard is quite significant. While 37.1 percent of the rural women in the sample are employed, the corresponding figure for the urban sample is only 26.9 percent.

**Table 6.4 Distribution of the Sample Women by Employment Status**

<b>Employment</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	115 (37.13)	53 (26.90)	278 (34.62)
Unemployed	381 (62.87)	144 (71.10)	525 (65.38)
Total	606 (75.46)	197 (24.54)	803 (100.00)

This is in conformity with the macro-level data on female unemployment which indicate that female unemployment is more severe in urban than in rural areas. Employment status by itself alone cannot be taken as an index of socio-economic status of women. There are several other factors which contribute to it like pattern of employment, nature of jobs, duration of work, and working conditions and above all, income.

Secondary data on female employment in India clearly point out that labour force participation rates for women have improved in recent decades as has been the case in most other countries. However, while in most countries women move to regular jobs, in the case of India the movement is to less advantageous positions such as casual labour (Horton, 1996). Table 6.5 gives the distribution of the sample by employment status.

Casual workers constitute 37.8 percent of the employed women in the sample; 28.8 percent are self-employed and only 33.4 percent have regular jobs. The rural-urban difference is only marginal with respect to casual workers. But for the other two types of employment, the difference is significant. While 47.2 percent of the urban employed women have regular jobs, the corresponding percentage for the rural sample is much lower, only 30.2 percent. In the case of the self-employed, the difference is the other way around: self-employment is higher in the rural areas (at 31.6 percent) than in the urban areas (17.0 percent). But the overall picture that emerges is clear: the majority of the employed women are casual workers under poor working conditions in extremely low-paid occupations.

**Table 6.5 Nature of Employment by Residence**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Regular	68 (30.22)	25 (47.16)	93 (33.45)
Casual	86 (38.22)	19 (35.84)	105 (37.76)
Self-employed	71 (31.55)	9 (16.98)	80 (28.77)
Total	225 (100.00)	53 (100.00)	278 (100.00)

The occupational distribution of the women workers is given in Table 6.6. The organised sector comprising the government and the private sectors accounts for nearly 25 percent of the female employment. But the largest single category is self-employment, the proportion of the self-employed being much higher in the rural sample than in the urban sample. Workers (skilled and unskilled together) constitute 34 percent of the labour force, the proportion of unskilled women workers being significantly higher in the rural sample (28.4 percent) than in the urban sample (11.3 percent).

**Table 6.6 Occupational Distribution of the Sample**

<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Private service	31 (13.77)	19 (35.84)	50 (17.98)
Govt. Service	12 (5.33)	7 (13.20)	19 (6.83)
Trade & Business	28 (12.44)	6 (11.32)	34 (12.33)
Skilled workers	19 (8.44)	6 (11.32)	25 (25.17)
Unskilled workers	64 (28.44)	6 (11.32)	70 (25.17)
Self-employed	71 (31.55)	9 (16.98)	80 (28.77)
Total	225 (100.00)	53 (100.00)	278 (100.00)

In the urban sample private services provide the largest source of employment (35.84 percent). Private services in Kerala, as anywhere else, are characterised by long hours of work and low wages.

The data on employment indicate that women even when they are gainfully employed tend to concentrate in jobs which do not require high levels of educational qualifications and technical skills and which yield low earnings.

**Table 6.7 Average Monthly Income by Occupation**

Occupation	Average Monthly Income (Rs)	
	Female	Male
Private Service	2026	2465
Govt. Service	4254	4832
Trade and Business	921	1084
Skilled worker	941	1335
Unskilled worker	728	1210
Self Employed	985	1530
Not specified	278	713
Average for the whole	1836	2452

The average monthly earnings of both males and females in the sample according to occupations are given in Table 6.7. The average monthly earnings for women for all occupations taken together work out to only Rs 1836 against Rs 2452 for men. In every occupational group taken separately also, men's incomes are found to be higher than those of women.

Even in government jobs, the male-female difference in earnings is quite significant. Since women and men in the same jobs are paid the same pay, this only shows that women tend to concentrate in lower grade jobs which require lower technical skills and management capabilities, and consequently lower earnings. Cross-national studies on earning differentials of women and men have also come up with similar conclusions.

### **Factors influencing female labour force participation**

Cain, Becker, Mincer, and Gronau regard that the female labour supply is determined by a choice between work and leisure, which is influenced by market wage rates. In theory, a change in wage rate produces two effects on labour supply. The 'substitution effect' produces more work because it raises the cost of leisure relative to work. The other, 'income effect' produces less work as it increases purchasing power. This general theory of choice could be applied very well in the case of men as well as single women for whom home work does not constitute a major activity. In the case of married women home work accounts for a major share of activity and hence cannot be ignored. Thus, the analysis of female labour force participation becomes relevant only in the context of the households, the conditions of which have a strong influence on labour force participation of women. Thus, the choice between work and leisure becomes a choice among three variables - market goods, home goods, and leisure. In this three-way choice structure, households are constrained by two factors, time and finance. Following this economic perspective, the present study examines the household conditions that affect female labour force participation, such as marital status, family size, number of children below five years of age, and presence of relatives and dependents in the household as well as socio-economic status of husband.



The economists' perspective completely ignores the influence of family background on labour force participation of women. But as early as the seventies, sociologists had emphasised this aspect. Family background plays a prominent role in labour force participation of women especially in developing countries where ascription predominates. This is because family background, portrayed through the educational and occupational characteristics of the parents, reflects the socio-economic level of the family of orientation. Many models have posited the statistical dependence of schooling on family background. Most of the effects of family background are believed to get transmitted through schooling. Moreover, occupational status is influenced by educational achievement. Schooling is in fact an intervening variable which has direct effect on occupational achievements. The later models evolved by sociologists to explain the determinants of female labour force participation have added several variables such as intelligence, personality, and ethnic category. But owing to data constraints we have limited the background variables to (i) number of years of schooling and (ii) educational and occupational status of mother, father, and husband. Apart from the above-mentioned variables, we have introduced job preference as an intervening variable influencing female labour force participation. This variable seems to be highly relevant in the case of Kerala where a high proportion of female unemployment is voluntary in nature decided by preferences and prejudices for jobs.

## **Education**

The relationship between education and female labour force participation has formed the topic of extensive studies. Several studies have reported that educational attainment is positively related to female labour force participation. But there exists the opposite view also. Smock (1981) in a comparative study of five developing countries reported a curvilinear relationship between educational attainments and female labour force participation. Women with high school education had lower participation rates than women with lower or higher levels of education. However, the study concluded that education facilitates women's entry into the modern sector activities outside traditional agriculture or petty trade. The distribution of the working women in the sample according to employment status and educational levels is given in Table 6.8. The data indicate the higher incidence of unemployment among uneducated women rather than among educated women. Out of the 48 illiterate women in the sample 29 (60.4 percent) are unemployed. Conversely, of the total 278 women employed 19 (6.8 percent) are illiterate. For educational qualifications higher than graduation, the proportions of the unemployed are lower.

Table 6.9 gives the percentage of employed and unemployed women at each level of education. The lowest proportion of the unemployed is found among professional degree holders (0.0 percent) followed by postgraduates (39.2 percent) and graduates (62.5 percent); the highest percentage is found to be among the above SSLC but below degree category (73.5 percent). The percentage of unemployment is higher among women with schooling (1 to 4 years and 5 to 10 years), than among illiterate women. Thus, we find that employment of women is high at the lowest and at the very high strata of educational qualifications. However, these findings do not conform to the macro- level findings on female employment by educational level provided by NSS 50th Round, results of which tell us that the rates of unemployment are higher for the higher levels of education for both men and women.

**Table 6.8 Female Employment Status by Educational Level**

Educational Level	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Illiterate	13 (5.7)	22 (5.8)	35 (5.7)	6 (11.3)	7 (4.8)	13 (6.6)	19 (6.8)	29 (5.5)	48 (5.9)
Classes 1-4	32 (14.3)	53 (13.9)	85 (14.0)	3 (5.6)	16 (11.1)	19 (9.6)	35 (12.6)	69 (13.1)	104 (12.9)
Class 5-10	109 (48.4)	188 (49.3)	297 (49.0)	9 (16.9)	41 (28.5)	50 (25.4)	118 (42.4)	229 (43.6)	347 (43.2)
Above S.S.L.C but below degree	34 (15.2)	88 (23.0)	122 (20.2)	17 (32.1)	54 (37.5)	71 (36.0)	51 (18.3)	142 (27.0)	193 (24.0)
Degree	16 (7.1)	20 (1.0)	36 (1.3)	8 (18.9)	20 (3.5)	28 (7.6)	24 (5.0)	40 (1.7)	64 (2.9)
Post Graduate	4 (1.8)	4 (1.0)	8 (1.3)	10 (18.9)	5 (3.5)	15 (7.6)	14 (5.0)	9 (1.7)	23 (2.9)
Professional	7 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	7 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	7 (0.9)
Diploma	10 (4.4)	6 (1.6)	16 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.5)	10 (3.6)	7 (1.3)	17 (2.1)
Total	225 (100)	381 (100)	606 (100)	53 (100)	144 (100)	197 (100)	278 (100)	525 (100)	803 (100)

**Table 6.9 Percentage of Employed and Unemployed Women by Educational Level**

Educational Level	% of Employed	% of Unemployed	Total
Illiterate	39.6	60.4	100.0
Classes 1-4	33.6	66.3	100.0
Classes 5-10	34.0	66.0	100.0
Above SSLC but below degree	26.5	73.5	100.0
Degree Holders	37.5	62.5	100.0
Post Graduates	60.8	39.2	100.0
Professional Degree	100.0	0.0	100.0
Other diplomas, etc.	58.8	41.2	100.0

A better understanding of the nature of the relationship between female employment and education is provided by the data on type of employment by level of education given in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10 Type of Female Employment by Level of Education**

Level of Education	Type of Employment			
	Regular	Casual	Self Employed	Total
Illiterate	–	17 (16.2)	2 (2.5)	19 (6.8)
Classes 1-4	3 (3.2)	27 (25.7)	5 (6.2)	35 (12.6)
Classes 5-10	12 (15.9)	50 (47.6)	56 (70.0)	118 (42.4)
Above S.S.L.C but Below degree	26 (27.9)	11 (10.5)	14 (17.5)	51 (18.3)
Degree	21 (22.5)	–	3 (3.7)	24 (8.6)
P.G	14 (15.0)	–	–	14 (5.0)
Professional Degree	7 (7.5)	–	–	7 (2.6)
Other Diploma	10 (10.7)	–	–	10 (3.6)
Total	93 (100.0)	105 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	278 (100.0)

The data clearly show the close association between nature of the job and level of education of the respondents. Thus, of the 93 women who have regular jobs, none is illiterate and the majority (55.7 percent) are either graduates or diploma holders. In the case of casual workers, none has a degree, a diploma or higher qualifications. Nearly one-sixth of the casual workers are illiterate; the proportion with qualifications higher than SSLC (but below degree) comes to around one-tenth. In the self-employed category also, only less than four percent have a degree; more than 78 percent in this category have only less than SSLC. Thus, the overall picture that emerges from the data is that education is the most important single factor that determines the nature of job for a woman; any policy for improving the quality of life of women through economic capability creation must, therefore, start with improvement in their educational attainments.

### **Marital status**

Marital status has a significant influence on decision-making of women to participate in the labour force. In the case of single women, work at home does not constitute a major activity and hence their choice narrows down to either paid employment or leisure. But in the case of married women, household duties are much more and as several studies in the West have demonstrated, married women are less likely to enter the labour force than single women.

Home and child care responsibilities demand a substantial amount of mothers' and wives' time which otherwise could be spent on gainful activities. Presser and Baldwin (1980) found that presence of young children affects married women's labour force participation adversely. This statement is particularly true in the case of industrialised countries where child care is quite expensive. In developing countries where inexpensive child care, by relatives and dependents in the household is available, the negative effect of having children may not be very strong. Single women may decide to work also out of sheer economic necessity. Thus, the widowed, the separated or the divorced are more likely to take up jobs than women whose husbands are alive. Husband's lower economic position may compel a married woman to take up employment to supplement family income; higher socio-economic status of the husband may promote wife's employment for quite different reasons; it may be due partly to the egalitarian attitude of the husband and partly to the fact that educational attainment of the wife is high. Thus, on the whole, marital status has a significant role in determining women's employment.

The distribution of the sample women population by marital and employment status is given in Table 6.11.

**Table 6.11 Distribution of Women by Employment Status and Marital Status**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Never Separated</b>	<b>Divorced Separated Widowed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	178	71	29	278
Unemployed	425	73	27	525
Total	603	144	56	803

$\chi^2 = 27.83$  (Significant at 1% level)

While among the employed women 64 percent are married and 36 percent single, among the unemployed women 81 percent are married. In other words, out of the 603 married women in the sample, 425 (i.e., more than 70 percent) are unemployed. Among single women the corresponding proportion is only 50 percent. This clearly indicates that employment among single women is higher than among married women. Moreover, the  $\chi^2$  value of 27.83 is significant at one percent level which statistically proves the association between marital status and employment status of women.

### **Children under five years of age**

Married women are often burdened with child care responsibilities which prevent them from entering labour force. This is more so if children are under the age of five. The data given in Table 6.12 supports this view.

Out of 278 employed females, only 17 (6.1 percent) have children under 5 years, while out of the 525 unemployed females, 67 (12.8 percent) have children under 5 years. Looked at from a different angle, we find that out of the 84 women with children under five, 80

**Table 6.12 Employment Status of Women by the Presence of children under the Age 5**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Women with children under 5 years of age</b>		
	Yes	No	Total
Employed	17	261	278
Unemployed	67	458	525
Total	84	719	803

$\chi^2 = 8.57$  (Significant at 1% level)

percent are unemployed. The negative effect of the presence of children under 5 on female employment is thus clear. The relationship between the two is statistically significant, the  $\chi^2$  value being 8.57 (which is significant at one percent levels).

### **Type of family**

Another variable which was found to have a positive influence on female labour force participation was presence of relatives and dependants in the household. As a proxy for inclusion of this variable, we have classified the household into extended or nuclear (Table 6.13).

**Table 6.13 Distribution of Households by Type according to Employment Status of Women**

<b>Employment status of Household</b>	<b>Type of Household</b>		
	Extended	Nuclear	Total
Employed	48	124	172
Unemployed	32	298	330
Total	80	422	502

$\chi^2 = 33.61$  (significant at 1% level)

Out of total 172 households with one or more working women, only 48 (27.9 percent) belong to the extended family category, whereas the majority of the households with working women belong to the nuclear type. But when we look at the relation from a different perspective, we find that out of extended households in the sample, 48 (60 percent) have one or more working women as against only 124 out of 422 (29.4 percent) in the case of nuclear households. This evidence is enough to indicate the positive influence of joint families on female employment. The value of  $\chi^2$  is 22.61, significant at one percent level.

### **Location of residence**

Several studies have reported that the location of residence has a strong bearing on labour force participation of both men and women; educational facilities and job opportunities are better and larger in urban areas. Balan, et al, (1973) in their study in Monterrey reported

that men raised in large cities have twice as many years of schooling, on the average, as that of those who grew up in rural areas. Labour force participation rates therefore tend to be higher in urban areas. The data on female employment by location of residence is given in Table 6.14.

**Table 6.14 Employment Status of Women by Location of Residence**

Employment Status	Residential Status		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Employed	225	53	278
Unemployed	381	144	525
Total	606	197	803

$\chi^2 = 6.87$  (significant at 1% level)

Of the 278 employed women in the sample the vast majority of 225 (80.9 percent) are from the rural areas. On the other hand, of the 606 women respondents constituting the rural sample, 37.13 percent, are employed. This is much higher than the corresponding figure for urban women, which is only 26.9 percent. Thus, contrary to the general perception that urban areas have better participation rates due to better educational and employment opportunities, in the present study, women in the rural areas are found to have had greater employment opportunities.

The macro data pertaining to Kerala also give a similar result. According to the 50th Round of NSS, the female labour force participation in Kerala (number of employed females per 1000 females by usual principal + subsidiary status) is 238 in rural areas and only 203 in urban areas. Moreover, the number of females unemployed per 1000 females is also higher in urban (49 per 1000), than in rural areas (29 per 1000). While it is found to be true in Kerala also that the location of residence has an influence on labour force participation, the relationship is found to be the reverse of that observed in other, international studies. Statistically,  $\chi^2$  value of 6.87 shows that the relationship is significant at one percent level.

### **Parents' and husbands' education**

Education is regarded as the key variable that affects the labour force participation of women. Educational achievement has been found to increase women's motivation to work, improve their employment opportunities, and raise their earning potential (Smock, 1981). The centrality of education in achieving higher socio-economic status has been widely studied (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Duncan, et al, 1972; Balan, et al, 1973). Standing (1970) reported that in developing countries, education improves the competitive power of women in the labour market, provides them with more complete information regarding work opportunities, and expands their horizons in the search for better economic conditions. The educational attainments of women are, in turn, conditioned by the socio-economic status of their parents.

## Fathers' education and female employment

Table 6.15 gives the data on women's employment status by fathers' educational levels.

It is surprising to note that even in Kerala, as many as 157 out of 803 (20 percent) of the respondent women are illiterate.

**Table 6.15 Female Employment by Fathers' Educational Attainment**

Employment status of women									
Educational Level of Fathers	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Illiterate	52 (23.1)	63 (16.5)	115 (18.9)	12 (22.6)	30 (20.5)	42 (21.3)	64 (23.0)	93 (17.7)	157 (20.0)
1-4	123 (54.6)	209 (54.8)	332 (54.7)	12 (22.6)	35 (24.1)	47 (23.8)	135 (48.6)	244 (46.5)	379 (47.2)
5-10	30 (13.3)	87 (22.8)	117 (19.3)	11 (20.7)	54 (37.5)	65 (32.9)	41 (14.7)	141 (26.8)	182 (22.6)
Above S.S.L.C	13 (6.7)	16 (4.2)	29 (4.8)	6 (11.3)	19 (13.2)	25 (12.7)	19 (6.8)	35 (6.6)	54 (6.7)
Degree	2 (0.9)	2 (0.5)	4 (0.7)	5 (9.4)	3 (2)	8 (4.1)	7 (2.5)	5 (0.9)	12 (1.5)
P.G.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Professional Degree	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (7.5)	3 (2.1)	7 (3.5)	4 (1.4)	3 (0.6)	7 (0.9)
Diploma	5 (2.2)	4 (1.0)	9 (1.5)	3 (5.7)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.5)	8 (2.9)	4 (0.7)	12 (1.5)
Total	225 (100)	381 (100)	606 (100)	53 (100)	144 (100)	197 (100)	278 (100)	525 (100)	803 (100)

Among the 278 women who are employed, 23 percent have illiterate fathers. In the rural sample the largest proportion of fathers have education only up to 4th standard (54.7 percent). In the urban sample the position is slightly better. However, 97.7 percent of the fathers in the rural sample and 70.7 percent in the urban sample have education up to the undergraduate level or less. None of the fathers have postgraduate qualification and a small proportion, 3.5 percent in urban areas and 0 percent in rural areas, have professional qualification. Strikingly, more than 90 percent of the unemployed women have their fathers' educational level below SSLC. The influence that fathers' education has on the employment status of their daughters is thus not quite clear.

### Mothers' education and female employment

The distribution of women by employment status according to their mothers' education is shown in Table 6.16.

**Table 6.16 Female Employment by Mothers' Educational Attainment**

Mothers' Education	Female Employment		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Illiterate	80 (28.8)	136 (25.9)	216 (26.9)
1-4	112 (40.3)	210 (40.0)	322 (40.1)
5-10	55 (19.8)	152 (28.9)	207 (25.8)
Above S.S.L.C	19 (6.8)	23 (4.4)	42 (5.1)
Degree	2 (0.7)	2 (0.3)	4 (0.4)
P.G	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.1)
Professional	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Other Diploma etc.	9 (3.2)	2 (0.3)	11 (1.3)
Total	278 (100.0)	525 (100.0)	803 (100.0)

Several studies in developed and developing countries have demonstrated the influence of mother's education on the labour force participation of daughters (Joansey, 1989).

Little evidence is observed of a positive association between mothers' educational attainments and the daughters' employment status. As is clear from the data, nearly 89 percent of the employed women have their mothers' education only up to SSLC. In the case of unemployed women the proportion is slightly higher at about 95 percent. The percentage of mothers with degree and above qualification is 4.2 for employed women and only 0.6 for unemployed women. The basic fact which is noteworthy here is that the general level of education is low for both fathers and mothers of the respondent women, employed and unemployed.

### Husbands' education and female employment

We examine the employment status of women also by the level of education of husband (Table 6.17). Three-fourths of the women in the sample are married. Of the married women, about 30 percent are employed. More than 60 percent of the husbands of the employed



women have education only up to SSLC; the corresponding proportion for the unemployed women among them is about 75 percent.

Perhaps, the only significant fact that comes out is that the proportion of husbands with higher educational qualifications is higher among employed women than among the unemployed women. But the relationship is not found to be significant. Thus we find that the educational levels of neither the parents nor the husbands have any significant influence on the employment status of women.

**Table 6.17 Female Employment by Husbands' Educational Attainment**

Husbands' educational level	Employment status of women		
	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Illiterate	13 (7.3)	47 (11.1)	60 (9.9)
1-4	38 (21.3)	70 (16.5)	108 (17.9)
5-10	61 (34.3)	202 (47.5)	263 (43.6)
Above S.S.L.C	30 (16.8)	65 (15.3)	95 (15.7)
Degree	13 (7.3)	26 (6.1)	39 (6.5)
P.G	7 (3.9)	2 (0.4)	9 (1.5)
Professional	4 (2.2)	6 (1.4)	10 (1.6)
Other Diploma	12 (6.7)	7 (1.6)	19 (3.2)
Total	178 (100.0)	425 (100.0)	603 (100.0)

### **Employment status of women by employment status of parents and husband**

Employment status of parents and/or husbands is likely to have influence on women's employment (Tables 6.18, 6.19, and 6.20). Since rural-urban differences are not pronounced, we have not examined data on employment, for rural and urban areas separately.

The data given in Table 6.18 (the estimated  $\chi^2$  value of which is not significant) indicate that the association between fathers' employment status and the employment status of women in the sample is not obvious. Joansy's study of Egypt, Thailand, and Columbia using macro-level data found, in fact, a negative relation between the two. Unlike the fathers' employment status mothers' employment status is found to be highly associated with the employment status of women in the sample. Several studies have demonstrated the positive influence of mothers' employment status on their daughters' employment (Devi, 1995). The present study also endorses this finding.

**Table 6.18 Women's Employment by Fathers' Employment Status**

<b>Fathers' employment Status</b>	<b>Daughters' employment status</b>		
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	262	501	763
Unemployed	16	24	40
Total	278	525	803

$$\chi^2 = 5.39 \text{ (not significant)}$$

**Table 6.19 Women's Employment by the Employment Status of their Mothers**

<b>Mothers' employment status</b>	<b>Daughters' employment status</b>		
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	112	99	211
Unemployed	166	426	592
Total	278	525	803

$$\chi^2 = 43.09 \text{ (significant at 1% level)}$$

The fact that mothers' employment status has a positive influence on daughters' employment is clear from the data given in Table 6.19. The majority of the employed mothers, 112 out of 211 (53 percent) have their daughters employed while majority of the unemployed mothers, only 166 out of 592 (28 percent), have their daughters employed. But if we look at the relationship from a different angle, we find that of the 278 employed women, 112 (40 percent) have their mothers also employed. Whereas, of the 525 unemployed women, 426 (81 percent) have their mothers also unemployed. Thus, the positive association of the employment status of mothers and that of daughters is clear. The association is significant statistically also as the  $\chi^2$  value is 43.09.

Finally, the association of the employment status of women and their husbands is not found significant (Table 6.20). Only 603 women in the sample had their husbands living with them at the time of the survey. The  $\chi^2$  value clearly indicates that there is little association between the employment status of husbands and wives.

**Table 6.20 Female Employment by Husbands' Employment Status**

<b>Husband's employment status</b>	<b>Wife's employment status</b>		
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Employed	166	391	557
Unemployed	12	34	46
Total	178	425	603

$$\chi^2 = 0.2819 \text{ (not significant)}$$

Of the 603 married women respondents, 166 are cases in which both husbands and wives are working; only 34 cases are reported where both husbands and wives are unemployed. In 391 cases (64.8 percent), husbands work while wives remain unemployed. Thus, the employment status of the husband does not seem to have significant influence on the employment status of the wife.

### **Family income and women's employment**

The economic status of the household reckoned in terms of per capita income is found to be an important variable that affects female labour force participation (Table 6.21). The monthly total income excluding women's income is taken. This is in order to get a correct picture of the economic position of the households regardless of the contribution of women. In that way it gives an indication of the female labour force participation arising out of economic necessity. The data given in Table 6.21 shows certain interesting characteristics. The highest observed number of the unemployed is found to be in the monthly income group of Rs 2000-3000. The participation rate is the highest, however, in the income group of Rs 5000-7000 (70 percent). In the income groups of Rs 7000 and above, the rate is on the average only less than 5 percent. The general inference therefore is that female labour force participation is high for low and middle-income groups and low for high-income groups.

### **Determinants of female labour force participation at the micro-level: A multivariate analysis**

In this section an attempt is made to identify the factors that determine female labour force participation at the micro level. Family background, educational attainments, and economic status of the household provide the context within which decisions are made regarding female employment. The extent of the influence of these variables is examined here using multiple regressions. The dependent variable is participation in the labour force which include the three categories of employed, (viz. regular, casual), self-employed, and unemployed who are looking for work. Participation is coded as a dummy variable (a value of 1 if employed and 0 otherwise). Twelve independent variables (explanatory variables) are used in the analysis. They are, location of residence ( $x_1=1$  if urban and 0 if rural), educational level ( $x_2$  = number of years of schooling), marital status ( $x_3=1$  if married and having husband and 0 otherwise), presence of relatives in the household ( $x_4$ ), father's education level ( $x_5$  = number of years of schooling), mother's educational level ( $x_6$  = number of years of schooling), husband's educational level ( $x_7$  = number of years of schooling), father's employment status ( $x_8=1$  if employed and 0 if unemployed), mother's employment status ( $x_9=1$  if employed and 0 if unemployed), husband's employment status ( $x_{10}=1$  if employed and 0 if unemployed), number of children under the age of 5 ( $x_{11}$ ), and family income ( $x_{12}$ ).

Table 6.22 shows the regression results. The joint effects of the explanatory variables account for 21 percent of the variation in the female labour force participation. Of the 12 independent variables only 5 are statistically significant. They are location of residence, marital status, presence of relatives, mothers' employment status, and family income.

**Table 6.21 Distribution of Households by Total Monthly Income (Excluding Women's Income) and Female Employment Status**

Monthly Income	No. of Households		Total	Proportion of the Employed in each Income group
	Employed	Unemployed		
Below 500	2 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.3)	100.0
500-1000	25 (11.9)	27 (9.2)	52 (10.4)	48.1
1000-2000	54 (25.7)	63 (21.6)	117 (23.3)	46.2
2000-3000	78 (37.1)	96 (32.8)	174 (34.7)	44.8
3000-5000	28 (13.3)	35 (11.9)	63 (12.5)	44.0
5000-7000	21 (10.0)	30 (10.3)	51 (10.2)	70.0
7000-10000	2 (0.9)	29 (9.9)	31 (6.2)	6.5
10000-15000	0 (0.0)	8 (2.7)	8 (1.6)	0.0
Above 15000	0 (0.0)	4 (1.4)	4 (1.0)	0.0
Total	210 (100.0)	292 (100.0)	502 (100.0)	0.0

The statistically significant negative coefficient of location of residence implies lower female work participation in urban areas than in rural areas. This is in conformity with the macro-level data on female employment at the State and national levels; in both cases rural employment is higher than urban employment for women.

One of the important reasons for the higher proportion of female employment in rural areas is the lesser opportunities for women to get employment in the organised sector which predominates the urban labour markets. Another reason is the greater scope for self-employment for women from the lower and middle class families and greater scope for farm sector activities in rural areas.

Still another factor found significant in the regression analysis is marital status. The negative coefficient implies a higher propensity for single women to go out for work. This is quite natural because single women may decide to work out of economic necessity.

**Table 6.22 Regression Model for the Labour Force Participation of the Women**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>t Stat</b>
Intercept	0.73049	0.10686	6.8359
Residential Status ( $x_1$ )	-0.25076*	0.05512	-4.5487
Own education ( $x_2$ )	0.00025	0.00663	0.0383
Marital Status ( $x_3$ )	-0.17554*	0.06103	-2.8760
Presence of Relatives ( $x_4$ )	-0.04544*	0.00943	-4.8232
Father's education ( $x_5$ )	-0.00844	0.00797	-1.0582
Mother's education ( $x_6$ )	-0.00169	0.00859	-0.1970
Husband's education ( $x_7$ )	0.00304	0.00763	0.3992
Father's employment ( $x_8$ )	-0.02621	0.06435	-0.4073
Mother's employment ( $x_9$ )	0.17184*	0.05600	3.0682
Husband's employment ( $x_{10}$ )	-0.00759	0.07847	-0.0967
No. of Children under 5 ( $x_{11}$ )	-0.00536	0.06512	0.0824
Family Income ( $x_{12}$ )	-0.04426*	0.00011	3.8801

$R^2 = 0.2069^*$        $F = 6.3053^*$  (\* - Significant at 1% level)

Presence of relatives is yet another variable found significant in the regression analysis. The positive coefficient indicates that presence of relatives tends to encourage female employment. The presence of relatives indicates an extended family structure in which household responsibilities of each individual member would be lesser and hence chances of women taking up employment outside the home larger. Moreover, the presence of relatives provide less costly and safer child care options which otherwise would act as a major hindrance to married women's labour force participation.

A variable which is found to have a strong positive influence on female labour force participation is mother's employment status. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant. A mother has the most powerful influence on her daughter and her career than anyone else.

The coefficient of family income (excluding women's income) is found to be negative and significant. This indicates that the propensity to work is higher in families with lower income than in families with higher income. Many earlier studies have also reported similar findings. The reason is obvious as women may be forced to take up employment to supplement family income when husband's incomes fall below the essential minimum.

Though other explanatory variables are not statistically significant they show certain interesting tendencies. For example, own education and husband's education have a positive influence on a woman's labour force participation. The positive influence of education on female employment is well documented by several studies. Husband's education promotes wife's employment partly due to egalitarian attitude on the part of the husband and partly to higher educational level of the wife.

The explanatory variables with negative coefficients (though not significant) are father's

education, mother's education, and father's employment status. All these are background variables that bring their influence of family of orientation. Several studies have already identified the strong influence of parental socio-economic background on children's achievements. Parents with higher socio-economic status may be choosier about jobs for their children whereas parents with lower socio-economic status may, out of necessity, encourage their daughters to take up any work that comes to hand. Yet another variable with a negative coefficient is the presence of children under five years of age. Women with small children are usually discouraged from taking up work outside home especially in countries where child care facilities are not fully developed and traditional norms prohibits them from leaving children in the custody of unfamiliar persons. But conditions are fast changing in Kerala and private crèches and child care centres have become common even in villages.

The overall picture that emerge from the multiple regression analysis is that the factors most likely to increase women's participation in the labour force are own education, husband's education, mothers' employment, and presence of relatives at home. The factors, which are more likely to decrease women's labour force participation are higher parental socio-economic status, marriage, residence in urban areas, high family income, and presence of children under the age of five at home. It is important to note that the multiple regression analysis\* attempted here is meant to explain the nature of the relationship between the variables rather than the magnitude of the change in the variables. However, the signs of the regression coefficients are important and they explain the nature of the relationship between the dependent variable (i.e., female labour force participation) and the selected independent variables.

### **Female labour force participation and preference for jobs**

The National Sample Survey, classifies persons 'not in the labour force' into various activities (code numbers 91 to 99): students, engaged in domestic duties, rentiers, pensioners, recipients of remittances, living on alms, infirm or disabled, too young or too old, prostitutes, smugglers etc., and casual workers not working due to sickness. According to the results of the 50th Round of NSS, 38 percent of the women in the rural areas and 45 percent in the urban areas are engaged in domestic duties as their principal usual status. A good proportion of these women are engaged simultaneously in subsidiary activities which could be classified either as 'economic', such as kitchen gardening, poultry, and dairy farming, free collection of fish and firewood or activities beneficial to the household such as processing of primary products produced by the household for own consumption. Thus, 89 percent of the women in the rural areas and nearly 63 percent of the women in the urban areas reported as being busy with domestic duties, are in fact engaged in activities either economic or beneficial to the household, but not in the market sense. While the monetary value of such work, if computed, would be enormous, many women have expressed willingness to take up other work. But macro-level data indicate only some broad outlines of the preference pattern of these women that too with regard to certain aspects. But even this amount of information is sufficient to point out to the fact that there exist differences in the preference pattern across States in India as well as between rural and urban areas. While we present the macro-level data on

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\* Regression models of this type with dummy dependent variable, generally known as dichotomous dependent variable regression models are beset with a few limitations, the most important being the 'non-normality' of the disturbance term and relatively small  $R^2$  value. This makes the OLS estimates less appropriate and the interpretation of  $R^2$  difficult.

the preference pattern of women across the States in this section, a more detailed analysis of the influence of the preference pattern on labour force participation is examined in the next section, using sample data.

The data presented in Table 6.23 show that 30.4 percent of the women reported as engaged in domestic duties in the rural areas expressed willingness to take up other work but only in their household premises. Home-based work is considered the most suitable form of work for women as it offers them greater flexibility and scope for combining house work with market work. This is typical of a patriarchal society where the 'male bread winner' concept still predominates and traditional customs and norms often restrict women's entry into labour force for taking up work outside the home. It is no wonder that in such societies, women prefer to take up work in household premises. Kerala's figures in this regard are lower than the all-India averages both in the rural and in the urban areas.

**Table 6.23 Proportion of Women (Age 15 and above) Engaged in Domestic Duties and Willing to Accept Work in the Different States 1993-'94**

State	Percentage of women willing to accept work in household premises	
	Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	26.1	24.8
Assam	33.8	32.1
Bihar	37.1	34.9
Gujarat	27.3	28.4
Haryana	32.4	27.1
Himachal Pradesh	21.9	34.0
Karnataka	25.2	20.1
Kerala	24.8	23.7
Madhya Pradesh	22.3	30.9
Maharashtra	24.9	26.8
Orissa	41.2	32.0
Punjab	30.7	32.1
Rajasthan	18.0	26.4
Tamil Nadu	21.3	19.5
Uttar Pradesh	21.3	29.9
West Bengal	32.2	28.0
All India	30.4	26.6

Source: Sarvekshana, Vol .21, No.2, 73rd Issue October-December 1997.

Interestingly, in conformity with the national pattern, the percentage of women willing to take up work in household premises is lower in urban areas than in rural areas in most States. But in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh the urban proportion is higher than the rural.

There are several factors that determine the decision of a woman to take up paid work outside the home. Type of job, proximity to home, conditions of work, financial status of the household, family responsibilities, and need for work are a few of these factors. Among them, type of work and conditions of work influence the individual preferences and prejudices most. On account of their commitment to domestic duties and responsibilities, women may prefer part-time work to full-time work. And a part-time work which is regular may be preferred to full-time work which is irregular. One of the reasons for the prevalence of part-time work among women in the Western countries is in fact such preference. Kalpagam (1999) who analysed the results of the NSS 50th Round report, stated, however, that a greater proportion of urban women willing to accept work in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, preferred full-time work to part-time work. The gender aspects of the relationship between preferences and labour force participation and the complexities that they imply could not be captured in the multiple regression model attempted earlier in this section. They are attempted, therefore, separately.

All available secondary data on employment and unemployment indicate that a larger proportion of women remain unemployed in Kerala than in the other States. While the majority remains unemployed by fate rather than choice, there are at least a few who opt to remain unemployed. The reasons for opting unemployment have remained largely uninvestigated in studies dealing with macro-level data. The prevailing impression that educated women in Kerala remained unemployed due to their preference for white-collar, salaried jobs is more a reality rather than myth. It is true that the rapid expansion of higher education in the State and the large supply of graduates in the labour market that ensued are the major factors contributing to educated unemployment in the State. At the same time improvement in the educational levels of women has led to a strong preference for white-collar jobs and salaried jobs and aversion for manual work. The influx of migrant labourers from other States to perform manual work and the dearth of workers in Kerala to perform certain agricultural activities such as ploughing, weeding and harvesting bear testimony to this attitude. Preference for salaried employment and aversion to manual work and self-employment among educated job seekers of Kerala is documented in a few recent studies (Mathew, 1995). But even the uneducated have strong job preferences based on factors such as social status, class consciousness, and the resulting interlinkages in the social hierarchy.

For analysis of the job preference pattern, women in the sample are divided into four groups: (i) educated and employed, (ii) educated and unemployed, (iii) uneducated and employed, and (iv) uneducated and unemployed. 'Educated' comprise women with educational qualifications of SSLC or above (Table 6.24). This division has been based on the criterion that all women with SSLC and above are classified as educated.

Of the 525 unemployed women in the sample 386 (73.5 percent) were unemployed because they did not get jobs of their tastes and preferences. Of the remaining, 83 (15.8 percent) did not respond and 56 (10.6 percent) reported that they were not interested in taking up any job. The reasons for opting out of the labour force ranged from 'social status' to 'family security'. The responses of the unemployed are analysed later in this section. To the question 'is this your preferred job' posed to the employed, only 81 out of 278



**Table 6.24 Distribution of Women by Education and Employment**

	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Total</b>
Educated (SSLC & above)	106	198	304
Less Educated (below SSLC) Including illiterates	172	327	499
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>803</b>

(29.1 percent) answered positively. Surprisingly, 70 percent of the employed women are not deriving job satisfaction. To the question ‘why don’t you change the job’ nearly 95 percent of this unsatisfied group answered ‘proximity to home’ as the most important reason. Only five percent felt that it was difficult to find another job. Regular salaried job was the dream of all the aspirants. But a few of women were ready to experiment with self-employment provided finance was made available to them and business could be conducted within their household premises (Table 6.25).

**Table 6.25 Distribution of Female Respondents by Their Most Preferred Job**

<b>Nature of Job</b>	<b>Less educated including illiterates</b>		<b>Educated</b>	
	<b>Respondents (%)</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Respondents(%)</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Govt. Regular (full time)	76.3	1	80.4	1
Govt. Regular (part time)	4.5	4	4.3	2
Private Regular (full time)	12.1	2	4.2	3
Private Regular (Part time)	4.5	4	3.5	4
Trade and Business	0.6	6	1.5	5
Self employment	3.4	3	1.5	5
Any job no preference	1.5	5	0.6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>100.00</b>	

The preference pattern given in Table 6.25 is based on the responses of 583 women (386 unemployed but willing to work and 197 employed women in jobs other than the most preferred). The first preference for about four-fifths of the educated and more than three-fourths of the less educated is regular, full-time job in government. However, for the former group, the second most preferred is full-time private job whereas for the above-SSLC group it is part-time job in government. Self-employment is the first preference for 3.4 percent of respondents in the less educated and 1.5 percent in the educated categories. Trade and business is the first choice of only a very small percentage in both the categories: About 1.5 percent in the less educated category and 0.6 percent in the educated category expressed no preference for any particular job.

Thus we find that job preference acts as a major hindrance for employment of women. The fact that as many as 73.5 percent of the unemployed women reported that they remain unemployed because ‘they did not get jobs of their tastes and preferences’ is quite revealing.

Our case studies given in the Appendix further endorse this fact. What is more surprising is the fact that not only the educated but even the less educated have strong job preference.

The factors for job preferences are several; they include prestige and social status, job security, proximity to home, adequacy of remuneration commensurate with qualification, and prospects for promotion. The factors were ranked in the order of their importance on the basis of the responses obtained from 583 women (386 unemployed and 197 employed).

Prestige and social status and proximity to home are found to be the most important factors for 65.8 percent of the respondents in the uneducated category. The latest NSS data (50th Round) corroborate this finding. According to this source, 30 percent of the rural housewives and 26.6 of the urban housewives have expressed their willingness to accept work in their household premises. Frank and Chasin (1996) observed that preference for jobs near home (in other words, the lack of mobility of women in Kerala) is one of the major reasons for female unemployment in the State. Security of job is the next most important factor which is behind the choice of a particular job. Among the respondents, 29.7 percent in the uneducated category and 32.5 percent in the educated category reported that security of job was the most important factor in selecting jobs. There are, however, differences regarding the nature of job security they are looking for. While three-fourths of the respondents in the educated category preferred full-time work, two-fifths among them preferred part-time work, provided it was regular. This kind of a preference for part-time employment is quite natural in the case of women, because of their commitment to domestic duties and activities performed for the benefit of the household. It is quite interesting to note that only a very small proportion of the respondents – 3.8 percent in the case of the less educated and 2.3 percent in the case of the educated – reported adequacy of income as a factor influencing preference for job. In the uneducated category no one reported job commensurate with qualification, as a factor of choice of particular jobs; in the educated category 3.1 percent felt it as an important factor. Less than one percent in each category did not respond to the question at all.

The above analysis of the job preference of women, though based on a limited sample, has several policy implications:

- (i) The fact that a large proportion (73.6 percent) of the unemployed women are willing to take up work indicates their desire and need to have access to cash income. No doubt, the only way to strengthen women's bargaining position within the household and to encounter patriarchal dominance is to provide them with gainful employment. Neither theoretical debates on the invisibility of women's work nor reformulating the method of estimation of GDP by including women's unpaid work, would bring meaningful results. Deliberate policies are required for promoting women's employment through schemes which are sensitive to feminist concerns like prestige and social status, and proximity to home.
- (ii) It should be noted that the employment schemes for women should be self-sustaining. A regular small income over a long period is much more welcomed than a higher

income for a short period as the preference patterns in the present study clearly indicate.

- (iii) At least a small proportion of the unemployed are willing to take up self-employment schemes. But they have serious concerns about financial resources and training facilities. Specific self-employment schemes, preferably those which can be implemented within household premises, which provide financial resources as well as necessary technical skills (through training), are essential to achieve the desired results.

Development policies need to be reoriented to make them sensitive to the needs and preferences of different sections of women, young and old, married and unmarried, and educated and uneducated. Such a reorientation alone would succeed and would address to the needs of women.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

This study is, by necessity, an exploratory one, aimed at identifying the determinants of female labour force participation in Kerala based on micro-level data. Active participation of women in the labour force has increased tremendously, worldwide, during the past few decades. However, macro-level data indicate that there exist wide divergences in the pattern of female labour force participation between developed and the developing countries. The level of female labour force participation in India is not only low but has remained almost stagnant over the past several decades. Moreover, there still exist large differences between the male and the female work participation rates.

Kerala, which ranks first among the Indian States in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI), presents, however, a poor picture in terms of female work participation. Perhaps, the most tragic failure of development in the State is the acute unemployment and low labour force participation rates for both men and women, despite remarkable achievements in the fields of education and health. The rapid expansion of higher education in the State and the large supply of graduates as well as the strong job preferences of the educated constitute the major factors contributing to the large-scale educated unemployment in the State. It seems that improvement in the educational levels of women in Kerala has created a strong preference for white collar jobs and salaried jobs and an aversion to manual work. The pattern of female employment in the State is distinctly different from the national pattern due to several factors. Demographic, social, economic, and even political factors have contributed to this pattern.

The decision of a woman, unlike that of a man, to participate in the labour force is the outcome of the decision-making of the household to which she belongs. Thus, it depends upon her personal and family characteristics and other intervening variables. Neither NSS nor Census publications on employment give details by personal or household characteristics. The available studies in Kerala, based on macro-level data, are unable to explain the real factors that determine the labour force participation of women. This study is a modest attempt to identify the factors at the micro level. The other objectives of the study are to examine the interlinkages between job preferences, levels of education and the employment status of women, the relationship between female employment background variables such as parents' and husbands' socio-economic status and other household conditions, and the inter-relationship among gender, work, and household relationship in terms of role of women in decision-making.

The study is based mainly on primary data collected from a random sample of 502 households spread over five *grama panchayats* and one municipality in Thrissur district of Kerala. The rural sample consists of 374 households and the urban sample, 128 households. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used for the selection of households. The survey was conducted during January to April 1999. Data were collected through the direct personal interview method by research investigators properly oriented for the purpose. A well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule which had four sections was used for the purpose of data collection. The study strictly followed the NSS conceptual framework of

“usual principal plus subsidiary” classification in collecting data on work. A multiple regression model was used for identifying the factors determining female labour force participation. For analysing the influence of female employment on gender relations within the household,  $\chi^2$  analysis was used. To compare the socio-economic status of the employed and the unemployed women, status grades were estimated on the basis of scores based on their response to five questions indicating socio-economic status.

The earlier works on various aspects of female employment, theoretical and empirical, were extensively reviewed. The past four decades have seen an upsurge in female labour force participation all over the world. Both demand and supply factors have contributed to this trend. But the high female labour force participation has not ensured gender equality in occupations in these countries. It is true that the process of economic development has led to a ‘feminisation’ of the work force. But women were found to concentrate in low-paid unskilled types of work.

Economic restructuring is affecting the employment position in many of the developing countries. The experience of Eastern European countries and Soviet Union clearly shows that whatever be the transformation possible in the long run, the present situation is one of growing unemployment, the victims of which are women more than men. It is observed that women bear, in general, a disproportionate share of the costs of the structural adjustment programmes; the main aim of economic reforms being the generation of higher rates of economic growth. But economic growth, by itself, cannot reduce gender inequality.

Time series data clearly reveal that work participation rates in India have been continuously declining for both the sexes. We find that Kerala’s work participation rates have remained even lower than the all-India rates. The declining trend is visible in Kerala’s case also. Thus, the male work participation rate in Kerala came down from 56.3 percent in 1901 to 47.8 percent in 1991 while the corresponding female work participation rate showed a much steeper reduction from 32.7 percent to 16.9 percent. The NSS data over the years also show similar trend and moreover, indicate a process of casualisation of the work force.

The pattern of occupational distribution of the work force in Kerala is significantly different from that of all-India. While the primary sector is still the major source of employment for men and women in India, in Kerala not even 50 percent of the work force is employed in the primary sector. The proportion of employment in the secondary sector is higher in Kerala. It was 20.65 percent in 1981 and increased to 21.96 percent in 1991. But, at the all-India level, it was only 9.04 percent in 1981 which declined further to 8.01 percent in 1991. The proportion of female workers in the secondary sector in Kerala is higher than the proportion of male workers. The most significant aspect of female employment in Kerala is, however, the high proportion of women employed in the tertiary sector. In 1981 this sector accounted for almost a quarter of the total female employment; it further increased to 30 percent in 1991. At the same time at the all-India level, the share of the tertiary sector in female employment was merely 9.35 percent in 1981 and only slightly higher, 10.84 percent, in 1991. Thus, non-primary sector accounts for the major share, 51.3 percent, in female employment in Kerala while at the national level it does not form even 20 percent of the

total female employment. The pattern of female employment in Kerala compares well with that of the developed countries of the West; nevertheless, the level of economic development of Kerala remains far behind that of the West or even that of the developed States in India.

Thrissur, popularly, known as the 'Cultural Capital' of Kerala, presents a better picture in terms of gender-related indices of development than the other districts of Kerala. It had in 1991 the highest sex ratio in the State, 1085 females per 1000 males as against the State average of 1036 females. The literacy rates were also high: 90.13 percent for males and 86.94 percent for females. Work participation rates were 31.96 percent for females and 47.18 percent for males. The selected sample area represent a diverse group in terms of topography, area, density of population, sex ratio, literacy, work participation rates, and percentage of female employment in the non-primary sector. The major uniformity among them is the high literacy rate for both males and females.

The sample area has a population of 2509 persons – 1219 men and 1290 women. The rural households have a population of 1881 persons – 903 men and 978 women. The corresponding figures for the municipality were 628 persons – 316 men and 312 women. The sex ratio of the rural sample is 1058 and for the urban sample 987. The average family size is 6.7 members in the rural sample and 4.9 in the urban sample.

In certain age groups, the number of females is less than of males. About 15 percent of the population is above 55 years of age while nearly 2 percent are above 75 years. The relatively high educational status of the people of Kerala is well-reflected in the sample. Only less than five percent of the sample population is illiterate. The proportion of illiterates is higher among women than among men; the level of literacy is higher in the urban area than in the rural areas. Surprisingly, the proportion of women with SSLC and higher qualifications is much higher than that of men in both the rural and the urban areas. The proportion of women with postgraduate qualifications is also higher than that of men. The majority of the respondents (68.73 percent) are Hindus. Christians constitute 24.1 percent and Muslims, only 7.17 percent.

Female work participation rate is 23 percent in rural areas and 17 percent in urban areas, whereas the same for men is 58 percent and 61 percent respectively. More than one-fourth of the women in rural areas and one-fifth in urban areas are reported as full time students. The proportion of students is slightly higher for men. The proportion of women dependents is higher than of men in both the rural and the urban areas. This may be because of the higher sex ratio and the higher life expectancy for women in general in Kerala. Nearly three-fifths of the households do not have a female worker. The proportion of such households is, however, much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This is in tune with the general pattern of female work participation in the State which is considerably higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Nearly one-fifth of the households in the rural sample and less than one-fourth in the urban sample are female-headed.

A general picture of the economic status of the households is obtained from the data on monthly per capita income of households. About one-half of the families have per capita monthly incomes of less than Rs 600; more than four-fifths in the rural sample and more

than three-fourths in the urban sample have monthly per capita incomes of less than Rs 900. Only about six percent in the rural areas and nine percent in the urban areas have monthly per capita incomes of more than Rs 1500. Thus, wide inequalities exist in economic conditions among the households. Nearly all the households (95 percent) have own houses, their proportion being higher in the rural sample than in the urban sample.

The changing lifestyles in the State are well-depicted in the sample by the large proportion (84 percent) of nuclear families. The proportion of extended families is much higher in the rural sample than in urban. The breakdown of the joint and extended family system was one of the significant social changes of the past century in Kerala.

Participation of women in economic activities outside home has an important bearing on gender relations within the household. Several studies in developed and developing countries have shown that women's relative economic power gives her control over a variety of 'life options', including various types of decisions. Women's independent incomes, consequent upon their joining the labour force, not only improve their status, but the well-being of the whole family as well. This is because women spend more for the sustenance of the family. In many developing countries, women's income is an important variable in the survival strategies of poor households. In the present study also women's income constitutes a substantial share of family income. In 45 percent of the households, women's income is more than 50 percent of the total family income and in about 17 percent more than 70 percent. In a small number of households, it constitutes the sole income of the family. The study also found that women contribute proportionately more towards family maintenance than men do from their earnings. Thus, while the average earnings to contribution ratio for women come to 0.86; the corresponding proportion is 0.68 for men. This finding has serious policy implications - any programme for improving the living standards of poor households should focus on creating income-earning opportunities for women.

Several studies have reported that economic independence increases the status of women in the household in general and enhances their role in decision-making. The present study has examined this aspect in detail. About two-thirds of the employed women in the rural sample and three-fourths in the urban sample feel that economic independence has improved their status in the household. However, about 30 percent of the respondents in the rural sample and 20 percent in the urban sample felt that independent income has not changed their status; there was a small proportion (eight percent in the rural sample and three percent in the urban sample) which even felt that economic independence has decreased their status in the household.

Most of the literature on marital power centres on the theme of women's independent income and role in decision-making. In the present study,  $\chi^2$  test was used to find out the association between employment status and role in decision-making. It was found that in 6 out of 7 areas of decision-making examined, employed women had a greater role than unemployed women, (with  $\chi^2$  values significant at one percent level of significance). These were decisions regarding food, clothing, entertainment, time-saving kitchen gadgets, and other consumer

durables and decisions regarding the number of children the household would have. The only area of decision-making in which employed women did not seem to have an edge over unemployed women was decisions regarding borrowing. The result of the analysis thus shows that working women with independent incomes have a decisively greater role in household decision-making than non-earning women.

Last, the status of women was graded for both employed and unemployed women on the basis of their response to a set of five objective questions. The respondents were categorised into three groups: High status, Medium status, and Low status. More than one-half the number of employed women and one-fourth of the unemployed women come under the high status category; about one-tenth of the employed women fall into the low-status category. Thus, the status scores and the grading based on them clearly indicate a higher status for employed women.

Though employment enhances status of a woman, it often results in 'double burden' for the working woman. Employed women work, most of the time, double the number of working hours put in by unemployed women. While employed women work, on an average, for more than 11 hours a day, the unemployed women's work load comes to only five hours a day. In fact most of the employed women work for 11-14 hours a day whereas more than 50 percent of the unemployed women work less than 5 hours a day. Thus, we find that paid work outside home does not reduce the family responsibilities of women. On the other hand, it only increases their work burden; and for the majority, employment outside home results in 'double burden'.

There is a common belief that female-headed households are basically poorer than male-headed households. Of the 502 households in the sample, 108 (21.5 percent) are female-headed, their incidence being more in the urban sample than in the rural sample. The basic household characteristics of the two groups, female-headed and male headed, are found quite different. From mean size of the family to per capita income, there are visible differences. While the per capita monthly income of the male-headed households come to Rs 793 that of the female-headed households works out to Rs 622. Similarly while more than 9 out of every 10 of the male-headed households have own house, the corresponding proportion for female-headed households is only about three-fourths. The differences do not end here. It spans from percentage of unemployed to mean family size and number of dependents. But with all these differences, the data do not provide any evidence to conclude that female-headed households in Kerala are poor, as is the general perception.

While the quality of life is quite high in Kerala, income levels are low. Kerala ranks first among the Indian States in terms of Gender Development Index (GDI) and in terms of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Moreover, Kerala has the lowest gender disparity rate in the country next only to Maharashtra. But at the same time Kerala ranks low in terms of factors such as per capita availability of food grains, extent of land/holdings, and employment rates for both the sexes. Again, the State which has the highest female literacy and education has the second highest female suicide rate in the country. Thus Kerala is indeed a bundle of contradictions with regard to women and development.



Of the 803 women in the female labour force in the sample, only about one-third is employed. It has been often argued that though structural adjustment programmes have created more jobs for women, these jobs are less advantageous and of a casual nature. NSS data also show an increase in the proportion of female casual workers. In the present study also, about 38 percent of the women workers are reported to be casual workers with only a marginal variation between the rural and the urban rates. Whereas regular workers constitute one-third, about 30 percent are self-employed. The proportion of the self-employed women is significantly higher in the rural sample (32 percent) than in the urban sample (17 percent). The organised sector - private and government taken together – accounts for a quarter of the female employment. Workers – skilled and unskilled taken together- account for a little more than one-third of the total number of the employed; trade and business constitute only one-eighth of the total employment. The occupational profile clearly indicates that women tend to concentrate in jobs which involve long hours of work and carry only low levels of wages and which do not require high educational qualifications or technical skills. The average earnings for the entire sample work out to Rs 1836 for women and Rs 2452 for men. Except for government services, the average monthly earnings are found to be low and in all the occupational categories average male earnings are higher than average female earnings.

Studies on the relationship between education and female labour force participation have reached the conclusion that education facilitates women's entry into modern sector activities outside traditional agriculture or petty trading. The present study also has come out with similar conclusions. The data on female employment by educational level in the sample show that the incidence of unemployment is higher among women with lower educational qualifications. About two-thirds of the women who had only low educational qualifications (of less than SSLC) remain unemployed. But at the other extreme, among professional degree holders none are unemployed and among postgraduates, three-fifths are employed. Among degree holders the corresponding proportion is only less than two-fifths and among the non-degree holders (with education higher than the SSLC level) it is a little more than one-fourth. Unemployment rates are high and the need for restructuring of the existing pattern of education to a more job-oriented one is urgent.

An important factor that determines female labour force participation is marital status. The data show that among the married women more than 70 percent remains unemployed, while among single women, as many as 50 percent are employed.

The presence of children under the age of five years is found to cause hindrance to women's going out for work. The proportion of such households in the sample was small; only one-fifth of the respondents in them reported as working.

The type of family is another factor that influences women's employment status. In extended families women's responsibilities for managing the home are fewer than in nuclear families; the former provide easy child care facilities. But in the changing social relations, extended families have become rare. From among the 80 extended families in the present sample, 48 (60 percent) have one or more women working. The positive influence of extended families on female employment is statistically established by the  $\chi^2$  value which is significant.

Like the other variables discussed, location of residence also has an important role in the decision of a woman to participate in the labour force. Unlike some studies conducted in the West, which have reported a higher incidence of employment in urban areas, the present study reports higher female participation in rural areas.

The socio-economic status of the parents might also influence female labour force participation. The data from our sample suggest that unemployed women have, in general, parents with lower educational qualifications. Like in the case of parents, educational attainments of husbands do not seem to have a direct influence on wives' labour force participation. Perhaps, the only significant fact is that the proportion of husbands with higher education qualifications is greater among employed women than among unemployed women.

Unlike education, employment status of parents and husbands has a more direct influence on female employment. But statistical analysis using  $\chi^2$  shows that only mother's employment status has a significant association with the employment status of women. The other two, father's and husband's employment status, do not seem to have any influence on female employment. Household's economic position is found to be another important variable affecting female labour force participation. Female labour force participation is found to be negatively related with the income of the family, i.e., women tend to go out for work when the economic position of the family is weak.

The above conclusions are reinforced by the multiple regression analysis we have attempted. In the regression analysis, 5 explanatory variables are found to be statistically significant out of the 12 variables included. They are residential status, marital status, presence of relatives, mothers' employment status, and family income (excluding women's income). The variables which are found to have a positive influence on female labour force participation are own education, husband's education, mother's employment status, and presence of relatives at home. Among these, mother's employment status and presence of relatives are found to be statistically significant. The negative factors are higher parental socio-economic status, marriage, residence in urban areas, higher family income, and presence of children below five years of age. Among these marital status and family income are statistically significant.

One variable which could not be included in the above analysis is job preference. The majority of the unemployed women remain so because they have strong job preference. In Kerala unemployment is, to a great extent, the result of the preference for white-collar, salaried jobs. For women, there are other factors also which shape the preference pattern: proximity to home, social status, class consciousness, and conformity with educational qualifications. Not only the educated but the less educated also are seen to have strong preferences. Nearly three-fourths of the unemployed women in the sample reported that they were unemployed because they did not get jobs of their liking. Even for those who were employed, only about 3 out of 10 reported that the present jobs they held were their most preferred jobs. In other words, the vast majority of the employed were forced to take up jobs which were not high in their preference ranking.

The first preference of the educated and the uneducated is regular jobs in government. Four-fifths in the educated category and more than three-fourths in the less educated (below SSLC) recorded it as their first preference. While part-time jobs in government formed the second preference for about four percent in the educated category, regular work in the private sector was the second preference for the uneducated category. Only very small proportions (three percent in the less educated category and less than two percent in the uneducated category) preferred self-employment. Trade and business was the least preferred category.

We also tried to identify the factors that shape job preferences. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents in the less educated category and a little more than three-fifths in the educated category reported that proximity to home and prestige and social status attached to the job were the most important factors. Security of job was the next most important factor; nearly 3 out of every 10 of the respondents in the less educated category and nearly one-third in the educated category reported it as the most important factor in the selection of a job. Adequacy of income and jobs commensurate with qualification was the other criteria in the preference for jobs. However, no one below SSLC found this as a factor in their preference for jobs. These findings suggest the need to reorient employment policies sensitive to women's needs and constraints.

Female labour participation has increased tremendously all over the world especially during the past three decades. But in India and especially in Kerala no drastic change has taken place in women's participation; the only noticeable change is an increase in casualisation of the female labour force. Several studies indicate that women in general occupy low-paid low-status jobs and, as a result, the gender disparity in earnings remains quite substantial. The development projects specially targeted at women did them more harm than good because of their lack of relevance to the needs of women and their insensitivity to the issues faced by them. The Structural Adjustment Programmes further worsened the conditions of women in developing countries as is evident from the fact that 70 percent of world's poor are still women. Thus, a new thinking is required for identifying the means by which the socio-economic conditions of women could be improved.

The results of the present study become relevant in this context because of its policy implications. First, policies that ignore the economic role of women may become detrimental to women. Dissemination of knowledge to women about new technologies is essential for equipping them on par with men in the production processes. Upgradation of skills alone would go a long way in improving women's productivity and their earning potential and above all inculcating in them a sense of belonging. Second, women have very little input at the highest level of policy making, with the result that policies often become insensitive to the needs and preferences of different sections of women. Unless policies are framed, whether for employment generation or for overall development with sensitivity to the women's needs, they are unlikely to yield the desired results. Third, any programme to be successful should teach women to be economically productive because that is the only solution for their empowerment. Education is a major influence in the women's struggle for economic power. Its effects on the gender hierarchy are immense. Higher levels of education facilitate not only current but future socio-economic achievement also. But education should be

technical and job-oriented rather than general as is the case today of producing non-professional graduates and even postgraduates. Skill upgradation for those women already employed is also essential so that their future becomes brighter. Fourth, child care facilities should be made more efficient and universal so that women who want to go out for work should not be handicapped by child care responsibilities. Last, all development policies should be reoriented so that they become sensitive to the needs of all sections of women, young and old, married and unmarried, and more educated and less educated.

## **Appendix -I**

### **Case Study 1**

Anila, a fair slim girl of 23 years, hails from a well-known family (as she claims) in the outskirts of Thrissur district. She has two younger sisters both in school and a younger brother who studied only up to 8th standard and works as an assistant to a painter. Her father had a small provision shop in the village just adjacent to their house which remains closed now due to financial problems. Her mother does not go for work as she has some health problems. Her father's business was closed when Anila was in her pre-degree class. She couldn't complete her studies. She has a job as an *ayah* in a crèche in Thrissur town which fetches her Rs 1000 per month, which is the sole income for the family. Her brother goes to far away places (was in Wayanad at the time of survey) and sends on rare occasions Rs 100 or 200. She has to spend Rs 150 per month for travel and she gives the balance to her mother. They are struggling hard to make both ends meet. She was called by a Gulf-returned family who stays in the same village for housework. They even offered her Rs 1500 per mensem plus free food and dress. But she refused it on grounds that the prospects for her marriage would be doomed if she happens to get labelled, as a house maid. She is now known to her villagers as 'a nursery school teacher'!!!

### **Case Study 2**

Deepa, 38 years old, has a Ph.D which she took as early as in 1986. But still she is teaching in a parallel college for which she is getting Rs 3000 per month. Her husband is in government service and has two boys. She applied for a teaching post in several colleges in and around Thrissur. But she was unsuccessful in her efforts. She did not take up an offer of a post of research assistant in a public sector undertaking in Thiruvananthapuram as she was not interested in disrupting family life. To her, proximity of the present job to home was its main attraction. To the question 'why are you spoiling your career' she answered bravely: 'career comes only second to a woman. Her family is her first priority'.

### **Case Study 3**

Lizzy 22 years, is an energetic girl with pre-degree qualification. She works as a home nurse with a private home-service-providing agency in Thrissur. After her pre-degree, she wanted to pursue studies. But her mother, a divorcee with three daughters, was unable to send her to a college. Her mother works in a cashew factory and her meagre income was not even sufficient to meet the minimum needs of the household. Lizzy saw the advertisement of the Thrissur-based agency in a Malayalam daily and applied even without telling her mother. Her mother was not interested in sending her good-looking daughter as 'home nurse' to unknown houses. She was about to get a job for her daughter in the cashew factory itself. But Lizzy was not interested as she felt it was tedious (spoiling her hands as well as her health) and infra dig. Like Anila, Lizzy also tells her friends and relatives that she is working as a nurse in a hospital in Thrissur. She gets only Rs 1200 per month which she feels is more than sufficient for it serves to maintain status. She has to change the household to serve every three months. She takes care to see that her address in the name of the private

household which she serves is not given to any of her relatives; her letters come to the agency only. She has been in Thrissur for the past six years moving homes at least four times a year and trying to adjust to the heterogeneous groups of people and surroundings she encounters in her life's journey.

#### **Case Study 4**

Fatima, 28 years, a B.A History graduate, works as a sales girl in a famous cloth shop in Thrissur town. Her mother is a divorcee and she has two elder sisters and two younger brothers. The family lives in their grandparents' house. Her grandfather is a *beedi*-roller and he is the sole earner in the family. The ladies help him in *beedi*-rolling. Fatima is the only educated member in the family. Her elder sisters were married off at the age of 15 or 16. But Fatima was keen to study and somehow managed to pass her B.A (History) by attending classes in a parallel college in the village. But now her mother feels that education has turned out to be a curse rather than a blessing for her daughter. Because she is a graduate, she doesn't like to work in the nearby *beedi* factory which is the major source of employment for women in the village. She does not want to get married either because most of the prospective grooms are either uneducated and if educated demand huge amounts of dowry. Fatima gets a monthly salary of Rs 1500 of which Rs 200 is spent on travel and light refreshment. Work in the cloth shop is not heavy except during festival seasons. But she has to keep standing all the working day, for nearly 10 hours with a short break of half an hour during lunch. She is very much depressed and leaves everything to God. But she feels that education has done precious little to improve her social or economic status.

#### **Case Study 5**

Sophy's story is different from the rest. She is a medical doctor by profession but remains a housewife. She is 36 years old and has a son and daughter both at school. Her husband is a businessman and manages, together with his brothers, his family's business in plastic goods, . Theirs is a joint family and Sophy has only limited responsibilities in the traditional set up of the joint family where her mother-in-law rules the roost. Sophy belongs to Kottayam and was a busy resident medical officer in a private hospital in Kottayam at the time of her marriage. Even after coming to Thrissur she worked in a private hospital till the time her first son was born. She then found it difficult to continue with the work. To the question as to why she did not give it a try again when her children started to go to school, it was the mother-in-law who intervened and said "there is no tradition of women going out for work in our family." She said it with the poise and diligence of an imperious matriarch for whom work outside home was *infra dig*. Sophy nodded ascent with chagrin.

Anila, Deepa, Lizzy, Fatima, and Sophy portray the different types of faces that we daily come across in our lives. Sophy's story is, of course, a little different from the rest. The family and the society incur huge losses by wasting away her skills and experience earned at considerable cost and effort.

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