

Women Empowerment: Is It A Reality Or A Myth?

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Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women as it enables them to find work, achieve financial independence, and gain economic strength, ultimately leading to their empowerment. Empowered women can, in turn, empower other women, creating a cycle of empowerment essential for any society. Kerala, known for its progressive social development model, has shown differing trends in women's status. However, there is still room¹ for improvement in women's participation in the labour market and their representation in higher levels of politics, both below the national average. This creates a paradox where women's economic and political positions at higher levels are lacking despite notable educational and health achievements. Additionally, the number of crimes against women has remained a concerning issue. This article sheds light on the unresolved aspects of women's empowerment in Kerala.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, education, employment, organised sector, crime.*

Introduction

Education is crucial for empowering women by enabling them to secure employment, become financially independent, and gain economic strength, ultimately leading to their empowerment. Once empowered, women can reach out and empower other women, creating a cycle of empowerment. Women's empowerment is fundamental to any society, state, or country, as women dominate a child's bare life. Women are an integral part of our society, and education empowers them and brings about positive attitudinal change. Therefore, it is crucial for India's socioeconomic and political progress. The Constitution of India enables the state to adopt affirmative measures to promote ways and means to empower women. Education is a crucial aspect of women's empowerment as it enables them to face challenges, challenge traditional gender roles, and improve their lives. Educating women is the most powerful tool to change their position in society. However, a large number of women in our country are still illiterate, disadvantaged, weak, and exploited. Education also reduces inequalities and helps improve their status within the family. Empowerment and capacity building allow women to gain practical knowledge and skills for better livelihoods. India can only become a developed nation if women can contribute to the best of their abilities, which is possible when they are educated and empowered.

As per records, a stellar picture is given related to women's empowerment and education in Kerala. Kerala is a state with high literacy. Women in Kerala are at the forefront compared to many other states in India in educational achievement, workforce participation, social and political involvement, etc. Most women are engaged in any skilled or unskilled job and contribute to their family income. Such a change happened due to the spread of education

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and general improvement in social conditions. Women members have a role in the families to decide all matters, including finances, household level, family, etc. But it is not like that in earlier periods—women living backstage of social and community living. After the formation of Kerala state in 1956, governments made a great effort to ensure education for all.

Despite the national circumstances, Kerala recognized for its progressive social development model, showed contrasting trends in women's status within the state. Kerala is the only state in the country with a consistently favourable sex ratio, reporting 1,084 females for every 1,000 males in the 2011 Census. The state's commendable human development achievements have also had a positive influence on the status of women. The Gender Inequality Index mentioned earlier indicates that the state has excelled in maintaining low maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates and a high proportion of educated adult females. However, there is still room for improvement in women's participation in the labour market and their representation in higher levels of politics. Kerala's performance in these areas is notably below the national average. This creates a paradox where women's educational and health achievements stand out, but their higher-level economic and political positions are lagging. Besides academic achievements and improvement in participation in the workforce, the number of crimes against women has remained a frightening enigma. This article highlights the unsolved side of Women's Empowerment in Kerala.

Review of Literature

Ehrlich (1975) attempted to analyse the relationship between education and crime by focusing on the potential role of education in determining opportunities. The study proposed that schooling does not consistently affect illegal and legal opportunities but rather an effect that varies based on the combination of education and legitimate training with the inputs used to produce legal and illicit returns.

The study by Wolf et al. (2014) indicates that in low and middle-income countries, income inequality is linked to homicide, robbery, and self-reported assault, while in high-income countries, urbanicity is significantly associated with official assault.

During 2006–2013, a study found a significant negative correlation between violence against women and female-to-male labour force participation. The study suggests that reducing gender-based violence may require addressing the gender gap in employment and income, alongside improving female political representation and educational opportunities. (Deeksha Tayal, 2014)

The term "missing girls", coined by Amartya Sen in 1990, refers to the gender-biased attitudes within households. This bias is evident in the form of sex-selective abortions and neglect of the nutritional and health needs of girl children in favour of boys. These biases arise from societal norms that relegate girls to the status of a burden. (Sen, 1990)

Research has consistently shown that women who have ownership of immovable property, such as a house or land, experience significantly lower rates of marital violence. This highlights the importance of empowering women through property ownership to create safer and more equitable households. (Panda, P., & Agarwal, B., 2005).

While educating women may not guarantee an improvement in their social status, empowering women economically reduces the crime committed against them. (Chakraborty, S, 2015)

Analysis and Discussion

There have been significant changes in women's employment in the past few decades. More women now work outside the home, earn a wage, and gain independence. However, it is essential to acknowledge that women are still paid less than men, and this wage gap has not

only persisted but has also grown over time. Many women hold part-time jobs or work in the informal economy, which offers little protection and few rights. On the other hand, data indicates that young women are now outperforming men regarding educational achievement.

Table 1.1: Literacy rates

Year	Male	Female	Total
1951	58.35	36.43	47.18
1961	64.89	45.36	55.08
1971	77.13	62.53	69.75
1981	84.56	73.36	78.85
1991	93.62	86.17	89.81
2001	94.24	87.72	90.86
2011	96.11	92.07	94.00

Source: Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority

Table 3.1 gives the literacy rate of Kerala as per the Census records. From 1951 onwards, the literacy rate among males and females increased continuously, reaching nearly 100 percent. In the last census, 2011, it was 96.1 percent for males and 92.07 percent for females. This reflects the improvement in women's role in society and achievement in education.

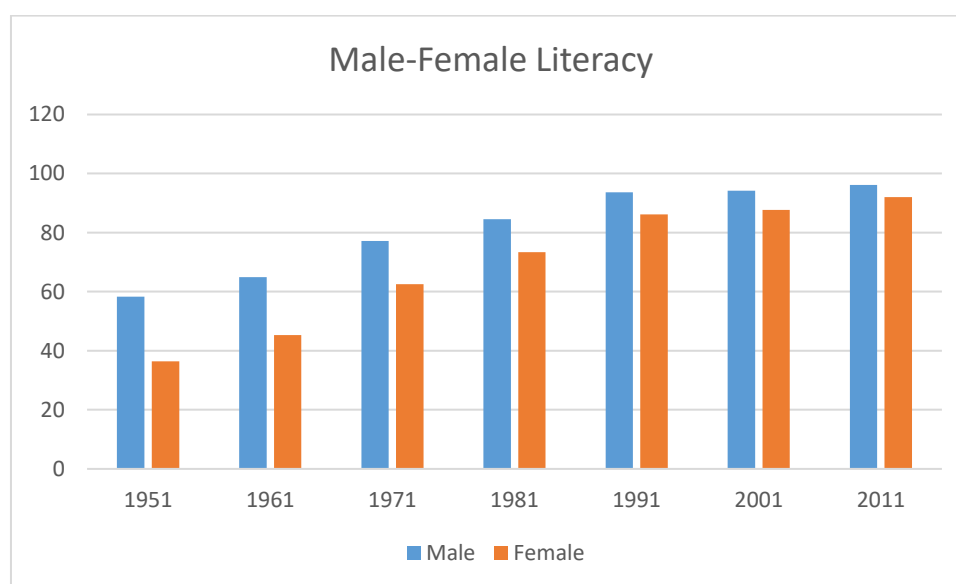


Table 1.2: Employment of Women in the Public Sector

Year	Public Sector		Percentage
	Women	Total	
2005	187648	614862	30.52
2010	194884	613113	31.78
2011	191203	612591	31.21
2012	184624	576742	32.01
2013	181892	565328	32.17
2014	193407	579372	33.38
2015	192856	570915	33.78
2016	186865	564930	33.08
2017	189234	560143	33.78
2018	189942	553924	34.29
2019	193807	560619	34.57

2020	193224	554919	34.82
2021	194080	556634	34.87

Source: Directorate of Employment, Government of Kerala

Table 1.2 shows women's participation in public-sector employment from 2005 onwards. It shows that it remained around a constant figure over the years, and no considerable improvement can be seen. Women in Kerala were highly literate and educated. However, their progress in achieving employment in the public sector remains weak and insignificant.

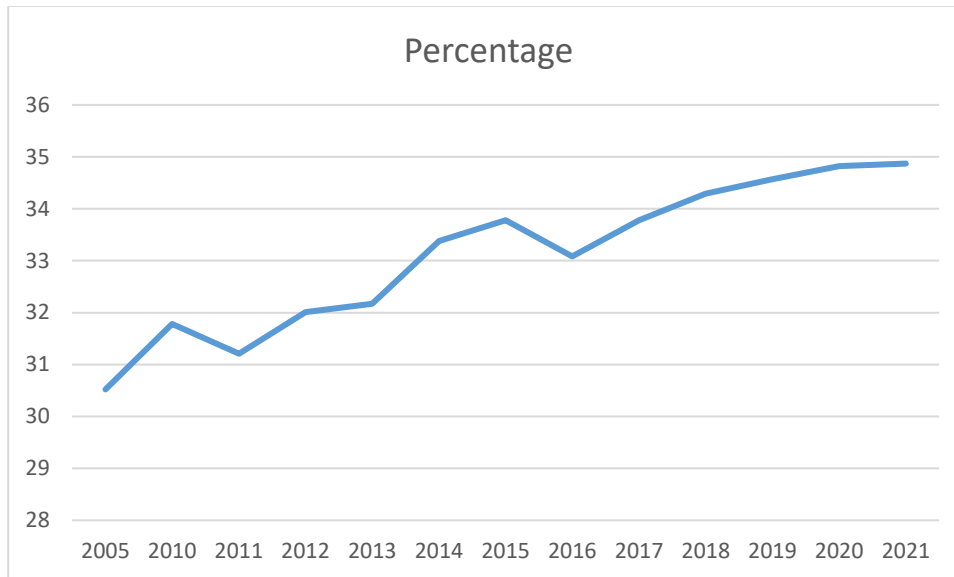


Table 1.3: Employment of Women in the Private Sector

Year	Women	Total	Percentage
2005	262048	524911	49.92
2010	252911	502402	50.34
2011	253597	498834	50.83
2012	264097	512087	51.57
2013	275038	522834	52.60
2014	284515	550374	51.69
2015	370143	566768	65.30
2016	315044	610077	51.64
2017	320006	613296	52.19
2018	335752	660053	50.87
2019	342877	686881	49.92
2020	368153	699447	52.63
2021	349978	691134	50.64

Source: Directorate of Employment, Government of Kerala

Table 1.3 analyses female participation in private-sector employment in Kerala. Compared to the private sector the position is better and significant progress can be shown over the years. Private sector jobs are mostly low-earning jobs with insecure features. Women were ready to engage in such low-paid jobs.

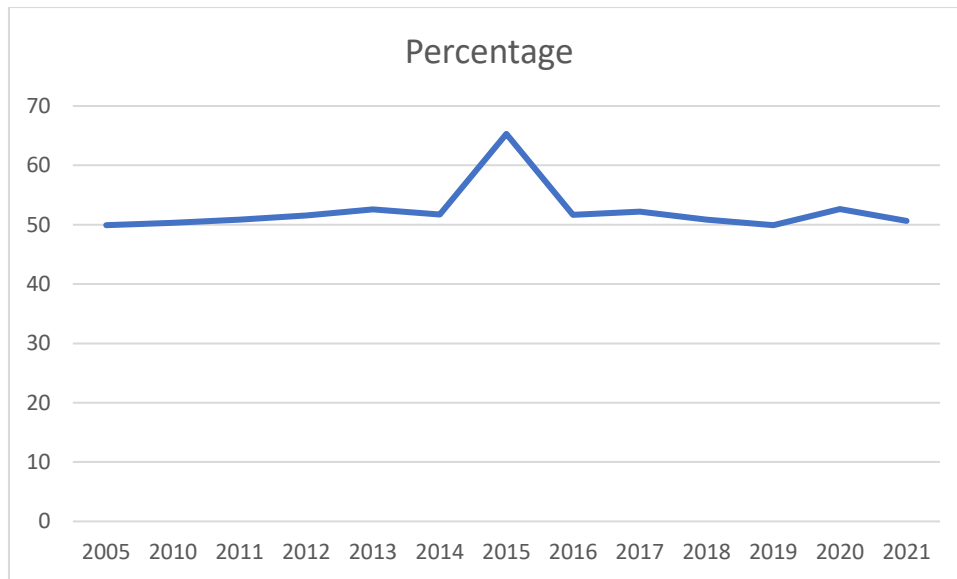


Table 1.4: Participation of Women in the Organized Sector

Year	No of Women	Total	Percentage
2005	449696	1139773	39.45
2010	447795	1115515	40.14
2011	444800	1111425	40.02
2012	448721	1088829	41.21
2013	456930	1088162	41.99
2014	477922	1129746	42.30
2015	562999	1137683	49.48
2016	501909	1175007	42.71
2017	509240	1173439	43.39
2018	525694	1213977	43.30
2019	536684	1247500	43.02
2020	561377	1254366	44.75
2021	544058	1247768	43.60

Source: Directorate of Employment, Government of Kerala

Table 1.4 provides data regarding the participation of females in total organized sector employment. A slight change is shown when examining from 2005, it was 39.45 percent to 43.6 percent in 2021. Overall performance in participation of women in the organized sector in Kerala is significant. It reflects improvement in their role in family and society as an income earning member. While earning income became more self-reliant and participated in decision-making.

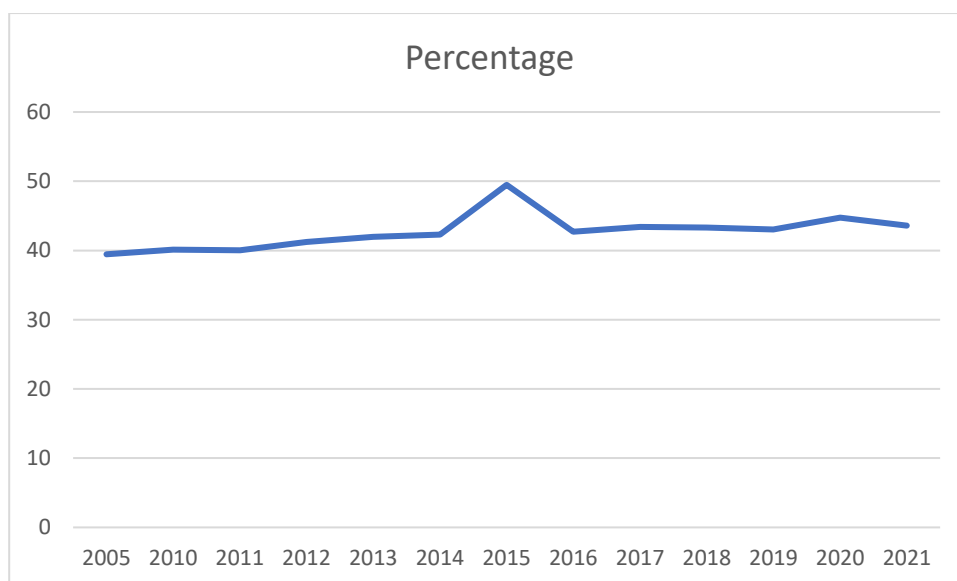
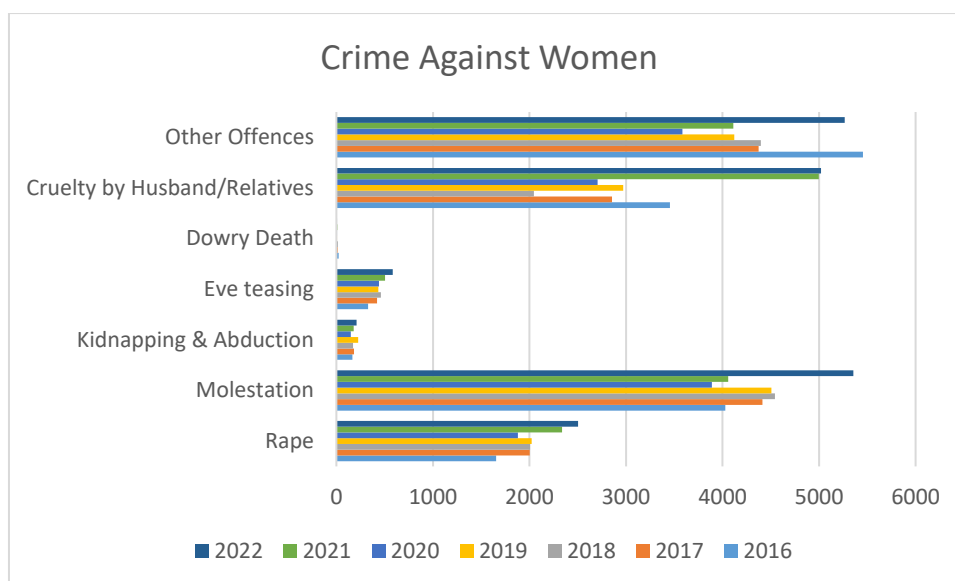


Table 1.5: Crimes Against Women in Kerala

Crime Heads	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Rape	1656	2003	2005	2023	1880	2339	2503
Molestation	4029	4413	4544	4507	3890	4059	5354
Kidnapping & Abduction	166	184	173	227	151	179	210
Eve teasing	328	421	461	435	442	504	584
Dowry Death	25	12	17	8	6	9	8
Cruelty by Husband/Relatives	3455	2856	2046	2970	2707	4997	5019
Other Offences	5455	4374	4397	4123	3583	4112	5265
Total	15114	14263	13643	14293	12659	16199	18943

Source: Crime Records Bureau, Kerala

The table provides records related to crimes against women in Kerala from 2016 to 2022. It illustrates a consistent upward trend in various offenses, including rape, molestation, violence against women by relatives, and other crimes. The data indicates that the situation is concerning, as all types of crimes against women demonstrate an increasing pattern. The data indicates a worrying trend, as all types of crimes against women have been on the rise. Furthermore, there has been a substantial surge in the number of crimes in the years following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022, compared to the previous years. the years following the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022 compared to previous years.



Conclusion

The role of women is evolving in the modern era of advancement. Women have excelled in various aspects of social life, taking on significant duties within the family, society, and politics. Women's empowerment can be attained through global education and increased workforce participation. Granting access to education and job opportunities is crucial for economically empowering women, leading to their independence and well-being. Women's empowerment is not merely a goal but a necessity for India's advancement. Eliminating gender gaps in education, employment, health, and political involvement is vital for shaping a brighter tomorrow. By advocating for women's rights, ensuring equal opportunities, and transforming societal attitudes, India can unlock the full potential of its women, fostering a more prosperous, inclusive, and forward-thinking society for all. Strengthening women's economic empowerment affords them greater opportunities, choices, and resources, which directly contributes to diminishing violence against women. Mere improvement in education alone is not sufficient; it is financial independence that empowers them to think and act independently.

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