

## Exploring the Underrepresentation of Women in Kerala's Political System: A Study of Uneven Patterns of Gender Equality, Challenges and Progress

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### ABSTRACT

One indication of Kerala's progress toward gender equality is the proportion of women in the legislature. This essay examines how women are underrepresented in Kerala's political system and elected bodies. According to data gathered from multiple sources, the legislative, Rajya Sabha, and Lok Sabha constituencies assigned to Kerala have very few female representations. We cannot close the gender gap in how people are portrayed in a state without considering these realities. The interplay of class, caste, and religious patriarchal and gender inscriptions is exemplified by the Kerala women in the patriarchal system. As a result, the study challenge centres on gender equality as a latent contradiction in Kerala women's daily lives. The study aims to determine whether women's equal rights are acknowledged. Kerala has a high human development index, yet women's representation does not match this. We can see that, in terms of representation, fewer than 10% of women are visible between 1960 and 2006. All political parties in Kerala ignore women's representation in the public sphere and politics, regardless of the colour of their flag. The population of women in Kerala is somewhat higher than that of men in every legislative constituency. Still, as of 2021, there is very little political representation for women in the Kerala legislative assembly.

**Keywords:** *Gender equality, Women's empowerment, democracy, Women's representation, Patriarchal*

### Introduction

Men have long dominated "politics." In 1762, the French Revolution was sparked by the beliefs of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who promoted the exclusion of women from politics. Additionally, the American Declaration of Independence rejected women's equal participation in politics. Gender parity was championed by philosophers such as J.S. Mill after the first century in all spheres of life, including politics. Early Greece and Rome barred women from voting. In 1832, the UK kept denying women the ability to vote in any capacity. The 19th century saw the subject of women's voting rights finally come to light. Women's opposition to women's voting rights in the United States and Great Britain did not start until the 20th century; throughout the 19th century, things were different. In this instance, women's voting rights in the West were pioneered by New Zealand. Women could only vote in general elections in most countries in 1960, nearly 50% of them. The last nation to permit the same was Switzerland in 1979. The first nations to allow women's representation in their parliaments were the United States, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. Indian women were granted the right to vote in British India thanks to national movements. However, it was permitted based on socioeconomic norms, such as the right to ownership, the ability to pay taxes, etc. The Central Council and State Council were established during the Minto-Morley reforms. The right to vote was arranged by the Madras presidency, the Bombay presidency, and the Rajkot state between 1921 and 1923. The two women voted to be included on the legislative council. As soon as India gained independence, women were granted equal rights to vote and to run for office (Article 326). However, the complete freedom to vote guaranteed by the constitution did not change the circumstances, methodology, or perspective of patriarchal

society.

#### **Kerala state establishment**

Kerala, often called Kerala Piravi, was founded on November 1st, 1956. Beginning with the State Reformation Act, parts of the princely realms of Travancore and Cochin were joined to the Malabar region of the Madras presidency. Keralan society has several castes, ranging from higher to lower caste. In almost all countries, women's status is mirrored as subordinate to their disputing partners, men. Women had to fight for their political, economic, and fundamental human rights. Manu uses the following justification: "A woman must never be independent. A woman must be subject to her father when she is a child, her husband when she is a young woman, and her sons when their lord is dead." The Marumakkathayam system of inheritance, also known as the matrilineal system, was a prominent feature of Keralan society. Keralan society's governmental units were linguistically distinct but also altered politically, socially, culturally, and economically. These changes laid the groundwork for linguistic stances during the 1900s–1930s. To put it briefly, the emergence of political parties and political consciousness, the addition of newspapers in regional languages, and the changes in independence all catalysed linguistic movements. Additionally, a component of the fourth administrative entity, the district of South Canara, was established by the Kasaragod and Hosdurg taluks, as well as the Malayalam-speaking region of today. Aikya Kerala, the overall arrangement for the state's development, was often referred to as the state's political history and its formation in 1956.

#### **Women's involvement in politics**

Citizens' involvement in election campaigns, rallies, accountability, and populist changes are all considered types of political participation. Two essential elements and principles of democracy are participation and representation. Engaging in and contributing to politics is referred to as political involvement. The system of political representation is one way to get involved in politics. The concept of representation symbolizes our values of equality. Representation signifies our values of equality and equal representation by stating that only those duly approved should be elected to the parliament and form the government. Kerala is a state that stands out for its progressive, socioeconomic, and demographic features. A sizable portion of women diligently cultivated their local electoral monopoly. The state has the highest proportion of female voters. Women accounted for roughly half of the votes cast in the Kerala elections. Regarding political engagement, this hope is still lacking. The value of equality sanctified in Article 14 of the Indian constitution has not yet been realized in Kerala's political participation and representation arena, and women's representation is control over all levels of decision-making. Gender equality cannot be achieved in Kerala if our ingrained prejudice against women persists.

Year	Total number of seats where women had contested (including all fronts)	Number of seats won	
		Left	Congress
1957	9	3	3
1960	13	2	5
1965	10	2	1
1967	7	1	0
1970		1	0
1977	11	1	0
1980	13	3	1 (one independent has also won)
1982	17	3	2
1987	34	5	3
1991	26	3	5
1996	55	8	5
2001	26	2	7
2006	70	7	0
2011	83	6	1
2016	110	8	0

#### **Women's representation**

The number of female representatives in British India during the Thiru Kochi, Malabar, and Travancore regimes was approximately 23. The first Dalit woman representative, Dakshayani Velayudhan, was one of the notable representatives. Ammu Swaminathan, A.V. Kuttimalu Amma, and Annie Mascarene represented the three regions. With decades of experience and excellent leadership skills, women's representatives K.R. Gowri and Susheela Gopalan were elevated to Chief Minister of Kerala. Still, the patriarchal mindset in Kerala politics prevented women from assuming essential positions in the state's legislative assembly. In all 140 Kerala constituent assemblies, the proportion of women is higher than that of men. Only one woman was elected to the Parliament in the 1960s and 1970s, and more than ten per cent of women never held seats in Kerala's legislative assembly, not even surpassing five per cent. Due to reservations in panchayats and municipalities, more changes will result from women's visibility in grassroots politics. Women's representation is inadequate in places like Kerala, where women outnumber men when compared to the high standards of living and human development index. This is a paradoxical situation that Kerala is facing: the widely praised Kerala model falls short regarding women's representation and leadership roles. We can only conclude from the election's seat distribution that Kerala offers very little to women. All of the major political parties' patriarchal ideologies field candidates to guarantee the failure of their female counterparts when they were granted additional seats. Until 2021, no political party in the Kerala domain had a seat allocation above 16 per cent. Because of this, women are calling for a reservation of at least 33 per cent of the 140 seats in the Kerala Assembly. In the much-lauded Kerala model, the significant and pervasive issue of gender inequality can only be resolved by increasing the number of women in the political sphere. Democratic politics will become more colourful as a result.

### Conclusion

In Kerala, women's political representation is deficient compared to men's. Kerala's female representation has consistently been low. Reservations for seats can only increase women's visibility across the political spectrum.

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