

"Empowerment Or Exploitation? A Gender Analysis Of Women Workers In Kerala's Micro, Small, And Traditional Industries, With Special Reference To Coir"

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Abstract

In India, where over half of the population is female, women are extremely important to the country's economy. More than 300 million people work in India, with many of them being women. (UN Women 2018-2019 Annual Report & 2011 Census). Micro and small enterprises contribute to industrial development on the one hand and employment generation on the other. With the advent of neoliberal policies, there have been both positive and negative impacts on women which is quite different in Independent India. There are openings, specific schemes, women-exclusive schemes of support with subsidies, etc, but still, there are challenges in fully availing and utilizing it primarily due to the social constraints and culturally imposed norms. Kudumbasree model in Kerala really remains a model to other regions in informing the grass root women mobilization and promoting women entrepreneurship. Despite such initiatives, still, women in Kerala continue in wage employment largely in micro and small enterprises, as the industrial climate in Kerala for large corporate is quite limited. The present study would analyze the role of women workers in micro, small and traditional industries of Kerala through the lights of various national and state reports. The study aims to address the contribution of women to these industries to the development and rural labor market of the State. Women have been an important part of the economic development of the state. Kerala remarkably well among other states in the case of development indices but women's work participation is low along this. Kerala's industrial sector is relatively backward and it has a vast effect on the traditional industrial sector.

Keywords: *Women Workers, Micro, Small and Traditional Industries.*

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I. Kerala's Micro, Small, And Traditional Industries

Kerala has the twelfth-highest number of MSMEs in India with more than 23.79 lakh units, 23.58 of which are microenterprises that employ more than 44.64 lakh people, (MSME Annual Report 2018–19). The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has frequently been hailed as the engine of economic growth for countries due to its crucial role in improving rural and underdeveloped communities through industrialization and creating a significant number of well-paying jobs at lower capital costs. As a result, wealth and income are distributed more fairly throughout the state. In Kerala there have 7843 newly registered MSME units in 2017-18 as per official statistics. Within this, 1935 units registered by women. (Table-1). As per National portal of India, currently 36250 registered MSME units in Kerala. (Table-2). Thrissur have highest number of units and Wayanad district have lower number of units.

Table-1
No. of SSI/MSME units in Kerala (Registered in Kerala during 2017-18)

Categories	Female	Male
Scheduled Caste	86	166
Scheduled Tribe	5	10
All Communities	1935	5908

Source: Gender statistics 2017-18, Directorate of Industries and Commerce, GOK

Table-2
Registration of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises MSME units with Udyog Aadhaar Number in Kerala. (National Portal)

State/ District	Manufacturing			Total
	Micro	Small	Medium	
Kerala	31518	4517	215	36250
Kasargode	662	94	0	756
Kannur	1589	245	11	1845
Wayanad	442	63	1	506
Kozhikode	2055	295	13	2363
Malappuram	1867	269	5	2141
Palakkad	1699	327	23	2049
Thrissur	3515	432	21	3968
Ernakulam	5242	1402	57	6701
Idukki	757	65	4	826
Kottayam	1860	245	13	2118
Alappuzha	2975	304	31	3310
Pathanamthitta	1047	95	10	1152
Kollam	2778	315	11	3104

Source -, Directorate of Industries and Commerce, Government of Kerala.

Coir Industry

The major small-scale industry in Kerala is coir sector. For the past fifty years, Kerala has dominated the coir product market. Portuguese industrialists launched the coir industry in India while the country was ruled by the British. The Kerala government's coir board monitors and evaluates the coir sector. Coir Industry Act of 1953 stipulates that the primary responsibility of the Coir Board is to foster the growth of coir-based businesses and boost their overall output. In addition to this, it investigates the marketing of coir goods both in the home market and in the foreign market. Since coir businesses do not have access to current conveniences and technology, it is becoming more difficult for these sectors to conduct profitable business and maintain a foothold in the highly competitive market. A great number of micro and small scale coir enterprises are stumbling and becoming extinct because they cannot find their path forward.

In Kerala, a substantial share of the coir industry's labour resides in cooperative societies. As of March 2015, Kerala had around 860 cooperative societies producing coir and items linked to coir. There have been 614 primary cooperative societies in the yarn business, 63 small-scale producer cooperative organizations, 67 fiber societies, 63 ICDP societies, 52 manufacturing societies, and one husk procurement society among them. In order to create coir yarn and other coir-based products, these coir cooperatives employed a combined 1.88 lakh people as of March 2015. Large percentages of the workers in the coir sector live in cooperative societies, with the exception of Kerala. In Kerala, coir and associated products were produced by about 860 cooperative organizations as of March 2015. (2016 Executive Summary of Coir Industries in India.)

In coir industry in Kerala majority of workers are female. They get very low wage rate. Mahila . The coir board implements the government's "Training, Extension, Quality Improvement, Mahila Coir Yojana and Welfare Measures" initiative. For decades, Indian rural communities, particularly coir industry women, have faced social and economic issues. The first women-focused self-employment initiative in the coir sector, MCY, employs rural women artisans in coir fiber-producing areas. (Remya. 2019).

Women make up the majority of the labor in Kerala's traditional industries. Some of these old sectors recruited workers from the lower caste. The coir industry, Ezhavas, and in cashew industry Harijans, respectively. It reveals the social and economic hierarchy. Mahatma Gandhi referred the so-called untouchable castes as "Harijans," and they are the lowest caste in all of India, whereas "Ezhavas" are a lower caste in Kerala that is just above the "Harijans." Their only reliance on the agricultural sector for employment resulted in poor and unstable wages, unreasonable terms and conditions of employment, and long periods of forced unemployment. M. Mathew (1986)

Cashew Industry

Kollam has long been the center of Kerala's cashew processing industry. The majority of the workers are female, and many of them are members of socially disadvantaged groups. The Kerala State Cashew Development Corporation (KSCDC) and Kerala State Cashew Workers Apex Co-operative Society are the two state agencies in charge of boosting Kerala's cashew processing industry (CAPEX) in cashew processing factories in India, women make about 95% of the workforce. India's top cashew-producing states are Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra, and Orissa. (Stevelal and Thomas,2018).

Handloom

The main agency in charge of fostering and expanding Kerala's handloom and textile sector is the Department of Industries and Commerce's Directorate of Handlooms and Textiles, Kerala. The Director also acts as the functional registrar for the Apex cooperative weavers society and cooperative spinning mills in the state.

The Kerala State Handloom Weaver's -operative Society (Hantex), which serves as the umbrella organization for main handloom cooperative groups, was founded in 1961. Hantex works with primary co-operative societies to help them access the materials they need, process their yarn, and market, advertise, and export their handcrafted products (which include handcrafted fabrics, garments, furnishings, sarees and traditional wears). As per the reports of Directorate of Handloom & Textiles in 2020-21, 9032 women weavers in this sector out of 13656 total workers. This indicates that majority of the workforce in this sector are women (Table-3)

Table-3
Details regarding in Handloom Industry in Kerala 2018-19 to 2020-21

Sl. No.	Item	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
1	Employment generated (person days in lakh)	31.58	31.66	11.67
2	No. of women weavers in total number weavers	108.15	9137	9032

Source: Directorate of Handloom & Textiles

Khadi & Village Industries

The Kerala Khadi and Village Industries Board, a statutory organization founded in 1957, is in charge of coordinating and promoting Khadi and Village Industries in the State. The Board coordinates and supports the programs run by registered organizations, people, departments, and cooperative groups. 12.5 lakh individuals are working in this industry in which eighty two percent are women.(Indian express, 2016).

Women Employment in Kerala

In Kerala, only 25% of women were economically active during the years 2011–12, compared to around 57 percent of men who were either employed or actively seeking employment. Additionally, around 75% of women are classified as economically in active. The gender disparity in LFPR, both in rural and urban areas, is demonstrating a consistent upward trend not only in Kerala but also across the rest of the country. In rural Kerala, it went from 304 percent in 1993–1994 to 325 percent in 2011–12, while in urban Kerala, it increased from 309 percent to 345 percent during the same time period. Kerala has the highest female unemployment rates, according multiple rounds of NSSO surveys on employment and unemployment. (Gender statistics,2017-18)

Mies,M.(1981) quoted that The distribution of various sorts of work to men and women based on perceptions of masculinity and femininity is known as the sexual division of labor. In feminist economics, the sexual division of labor—which is viewed as fluctuating across time and space and always being negotiated—is made up of institutional rules, norms, and practices that determine how tasks are distributed among men and women (and between girls and boys).

In Most of the traditional industrial sectors, hierarchy is direct, although it is typically indirect in most relatively modern industries. In India overall, women's rates of work participation have consistently lagged below men's rates, and as women's rates of work participation have been sharply declining, the relative gap between men and women in this regard has been widening. Female's labor force participation in Kerala follows the national trend and has been steadily falling over the majority of the twenty-first century. Addressing the participation of women in Kerala's industrial sector, there isn't any official aggregate data. As little more than a result, the scope of an analysis of women's roles is constrained because one must rely on assumptions. The primary industry Kerala women worked in the earlier was agriculture. As time went on, new industries began to appear that are now regarded as traditional due to their early beginnings and the methods and techniques used, such as coir (the conversion of coconut husks into yarn used to make mats) and cashew in the early years of the current century. Women now have more career options in the industrial sector due to the expansion of these traditional industries. (Mathew, 1986).

II. Conclusion

The study mainly concerned with the status of women workers in micro, small and traditional industries of Kerala. analysis shows that women's work participation is higher in the traditional industries with low wages. it therefore arises from the present study that rather than condition of traditional industries of Kerala, the likely explanation for women's higher number of employment in these sector as a result of deep rooted patriarchal gender roles in the society. Any policy measure to improve women's employment in this sector has to look beyond the improvement of production increase and mechanization to address the gender

roles and subordination of women in this area.

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