

Executive Summary of the Minor Research Project

‘Women Empowerment and Freedom Movement in Kerala – An Introspection’

“Empowerment is a pre-requisite for creating a good nation When women are empowered, a society with stability is assured” – averred Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

Movements for the empowerment of women constitute a significant sociological development in the history of mankind. The term ‘empowerment’ had become a buzzword during the civil rights movement in U.S.A. in the 1960s. ‘Empowerment’ literally means ‘to invest with power’. It is the ability of woman to control her own destiny. Empowerment is the multi-dimensional process of increasing power of the low-power-groups, especially those of the marginalized, the poor and the illiterate.

Studies on gender issues and empowerment have not received adequate scholarly pursuit till recently. This project, ‘Women Empowerment and Freedom Movement in Kerala – An introspection’ is undertaken with an intention to identify the factors that facilitated the transition of women’s space of activity from domestic to the public sphere.

Education is a major vehicle of reform and the chief motivating factor in the empowerment of women. However, until the beginning of the twentieth century there was hardly any provision for the formal education of girls in Kerala. Women were enslaved by social customs, religious bigotry and caste rigidity. An analysis of Kerala’s social structure enables us to discern that the patriarchal social order restricted women’s entry into educational institutions. It is in such a context that education became a powerful weapon of liberation.

India's struggle for freedom occupies an important niche in the history of modern world. Equally significant was the gender involvement and domestication of public sphere by women in the anti-colonial struggle. The last decades of the nineteenth century and the initial years of the twentieth century established new social values with a growing awareness of women's participation in the freedom struggle. The European penetration opened the gates of India for the entry of western liberal ideas. The British interference not only meant a new political order but also had a deep rooted implication on the Indian society and economy. The introduction of western culture in the educational curriculum of native India acted as a potent factor in the large scale participation of women in the public sphere not only in Kerala but also in the rest of the country.

The expansion of education among women, though very slow, had a disproportionately powerful impact as a facilitator to the entry of women into the realm of political activity. Women found an escape from conventional roles through political action. The awakening of women and the growth of political consciousness were the outcome of a number of forces at work – the spread of education being the most important among them.

The entry of women, as empirically evidenced from the study, into the arena of formal education system inaugurated a new era in the entire discourse of gender relations in Kerala. The intervention of learning among women had successfully transformed their status and position in the society and acted as an effective influence in breaking down the socio-cultural barriers that restricted their entry into the public domain and civil society.

- **Dr. Praseetha N C**