



ALLOCATION FOR WOMEN-CENTERED POLICIES IN KERALA BUDGET 2024 – 2025 - AN ANALYSIS.

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ABSTRACT

Kerala's developmental approach is unique in India since it places equal emphasis on social justice and economic progress. Significant advancements in health, life expectancy, literacy, and women's status have been made possible by this focus on social variables. Kerala is a fascinating scenario with strong social indicators for women's health and education. Despite these advancements, the Kerala model presents a complex picture for women. While social indicators are high, economic opportunities for women remain limited. Labour force participation for women is lower compared to the national average, and they are often concentrated in informal or low-paying jobs. Furthermore, despite high literacy rates, translating education into leadership positions in government or industry remains a challenge. The paper analyses to what extent the Kerala budget 2024-25 addresses the needs and aspirations of women and how effective are its allocations in promoting women empowerment. The research article is a doctrinal work with a vivid study of the Kerala budget 2024-25 along with various research articles related to women empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Allocation of funds, Budget 2023-24, Budget 2024-25, Labour Participation, girl child development.

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INTRODUCTION

The very concept of empowerment is a social process which promotes the involvement of people in their social, economic, educational realms which fetches them more control in their life as well as in the lives of the society as a whole. It is the method of enabling a person to stretch out one's inner talents and proficiency to decisions through adequate economic support, opportunities, choices and freedom.

The American poet, memoirist and civil rights activists Maya Angelou has said "a women may have to stand up for herself and the stand may not be done knowingly or without any claim however the very action is for all women". Empowerment is a concept of qualifying a person to know the depth of rapport between their action and its results which prompts them to reach the outcome they crave. It is an ardent desire and formulation of a goal with four perceptions namely understanding, capability, self-determination and result. It is the bold step formation through intrapersonal, interpersonal and communitarian intervention enabling an individual to fight for a cause with strong and ardent determination. It is a walk with knowledge of interdependence but a mutual relationship with people of the same thought and community for the betterment of society.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is the endorsing and strengthening of the sense of self-worth among woman, the right to fix and choose their goals in their life for betterment in all walks of their life and open the accessibility to the goals through sufficient resources. It is the attainment of the will, to reach their goal of life, to control and regulate their life where ever they may be. The goal of life should be to pave way in the society through social change which would promote social justice, economic regulation and even national and international development(Mahbub, 2023).

Every sort of empowerment of any individual is based on adequate education, professional training, creation of depth awareness, structuring of self-confidence, increase of options and choices, availability of resources and capability and will to reform the social stigma and structure of various discriminations such as of gender, race, cast, creed religion etc. The way of women empowerment may be categorized into five parts such as emotional, educational, societal, economic and political. Emotional empowerment enables a person to stand to the cognitive capacities rather than other external traits(Bhattacharyya, 2023). Through it, the person would able to reason out the whys behind every barrier that comes across the person which should be crossed with the cognitive factors. Education is the foundation of all structures of personality which would build the person with self-confidence and self-esteem. The social relationship of a woman is widened and strengthened with social empowerment. It also places a woman in a better position and status in society as well as opens new doors of relationships for better growth and development. Economic stability is another core role played in empowerment and it plays vital role in women empowerment. Every woman should be able to stand on their own income and for that, they should be professionally qualified and equipped to earn their living. The social, political, educational and economic empowerment of women should also enable a woman to attain emotional stability to face challenges and barriers in life(Singh & Singh, 2020).

ALLOCATION IN KERALA BUDGET 2024- 2025

The Kerala government has imbibed numerous programmes for the empowerment of women in the 2024-2025 budget (Balagopal, 2024). Given its strong stance on gender equality, the Kerala budget is unique in India. It is essential to examine how it distributes funds for women's empowerment and well-being as a critical analysis can pave the way for future developmental efforts.

Women Empowerment in Rural Development Schemes

Focus on Rural Development is another significant plan for women's empowerment in the Kerala government's 2024–2025 budget. The budget has earmarked an amount of Rs. 1768.32 for rural development. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Guarantee scheme is one of the important schemes for Rural Development, which is implemented through coordination with the Central Government. Even during the continuance reluctance of the Central Government to fund the projects, the State Government has opened new avenues of job opportunities. The programme anticipates that one-third of its beneficiaries will be female; in Kerala, the percentage of women recipients exceeds 90%.

Women Empowerment Through Kudumbasree Projects

The State Government of Kerala has given special focus to women empowerment through the establishment of Kudumbasree. The very goal of this project is upliftment of women's position through the eradication of poverty. The mission has been executed with the support and assistance of Local Self Government for the last 25 years. The Kudumbasree is quite successful in bringing radical changes in the lives of women, especially in social, cultural and economic realms. It has also undertaken the campaign "Return to School" for those who had failed in schooling at their younger age. The campaign aimed comprehensive empowerment of women through education and the crusade was quite successful for it had a participation of 38.7 lakh people. The schooling also made kudumbasree more dynamic and effective. Another women empowerment movement of Kudumbasree is the Kudumbasree Livelihood Initiative of Transformation (K-LIFT). It is a distinct livelihood project which aims at an income for 3 lakh women which would enable and empower them to be self-reliant. In the fiscal year 2024–2025, a sum of Rs 265 is set aside for Kudumbasree which is five crores higher than the previous year.

The active involvement of Kudumbasree women is sought in Swachh Bharath Mission which also enables women to earn their livelihood at the same time clean every home and the Country. The State Government earmarked an amount of Rs. 7.5 crore for the mission. 25 crore rupees is earmarked for Suchitha Mission which ensures sanitation including Solid- Liquid waste management. The State Government is also active in the Central programme named Deen Dayal Andhyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) for which the state has reserved Rs. 65 crores (Varghese & Puthussery, 2012).

Life Mission Scheme and Women Empowerment

The achievement of women empowerment is contingent upon having sufficient housing to reside in and communicate family sentiments. The State Government has taken initiative for the welfare and empowerment of women through the Housing Scheme which is also known as the LIFE mission. A shelter to live in peace would bring solace to every woman. The State Government has approved the construction of 1,51,073 houses under this mission which would avail houses for homeless families, especially the downtrodden. The Government aims to support Five Lakh homeless families with houses in the budget year 2024-25. The government has contributed 17,104.87 crore for this massive scheme so far which would bring forth social as well as economic development and empowerment of people especially women folk(LIFE - English Article, 2016).

Village And Small Industries Schemes

Another area which is given importance by the Kerala Government in the budget 2024 – 2025 is the progress of Village and Small Industries which may be implemented with the support of MSMEs. Women are included in the target group where the government has earmarked Rs. 215.64 crores. The project is divided into three namely small-scale industries, Commerce Sector and Handicraft. The promotion of Village and small-scale industries would bring socio-cultural advancement and successful entrepreneurship among women(Dr S P Mishra, 1996). Through the mission the government empowers women in the target group where they can take all the responsibilities, risks, opportunities and benefits to reach the goal of good entrepreneurship. Self-employment serves as a stepping stone where an individual can operate as a solo owner, manage the business as a partner or collaborate with others as an independent contractor, or provide consulting services. (Budig & Hodges, 2009). The budget has also kept Rs. 17.06 crore in the scheme named Margin Money Grant. It is to avail capital for investors who are engaged in nano industries. The government also earmarked with Rs. 18.02 crore for micro projects and 20 percent beneficiaries of these projects are women(Balagopal, 2024).

Kerala Climate Resilient Agri Value Chain Modernization Project (KERA)

The KERA project is launched with the support and aid of the World Bank Associations. The very object of the KERA project is to develop and strengthen farmers of all walks with a special focus on smallholder farmers. The localization and promotion of farmers is vested through various projects such as micro-farming, promotion of small and medium enterprises, and establishment of farmer societies and organizations. The Govt. of Kerala has projected Rs. 2365 crore for KERA to be used in the coming five years. The scheme has a special focus on the welfare and development of women. An amount of Rs. 18.92 is allocated for the development of the area under pomiculture of which one-fourth of its beneficiaries are women.

Coastal Area Development

Fishing area which contributes significantly to the State's economy requires thorough development in the basic infrastructure and human resources. Even though the fisherwomen indicate a high level of empowerment in the case of value-added products they often face a lack of recognition for their work and are excluded from the benefits meant for fishermen. Government schemes and programmes are supporting

fisherwomen to be self-reliant the area requires continued efforts to ensure their equal rights, recognition and economic empowerment. Considering this out of the 60 crore rupees allotted for the development of fishermen, 17 crores are earmarked for the alternative livelihood of fisherwomen.

Educational Schemes

Education is the most vital root of every form of empowerment. It moulds a person and decides the destiny of the person. Sufficient education for women would have a significant impact on shaping their lives and empowering them. It enables women to decide prudently about their life, career, and marriages and even enables them to lead a life of their conscious. There is an African proverb, 'If you educate a man, you are educating an individual but if you are educating a woman, you are educating the Nation itself' (Joshi & Bora Sharma, 2021). The government is quite optimistic and supportive of women's education. The sheer evidence for the support is evident in the budget where the government has earmarked one crore rupees for the celebration of the 125th anniversary and development of the library of Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram. The Government also contributes to the promotion of the nursing infrastructure of MG University pointing to the larger objective of the empowerment of women.

Cultural Schemes

Cultural norms in the form of equity stand as a barrier to women empowerment in every society. The societal norms that are open to men are stringent in the case of women and it is unfair to the growth and development of any nation (Zeeshan, 2015). The Kerala budget 2024 – 2025 focuses in the promotion of cultural heritage. In that, the budget specifically states that an amount of Rs. 1.3 crores are expected to be specifically for women empowerment out of Rs. 14 crores allotted for Kerala State Chalachitra Academy (Balagopal, 2024).

Urban Development Schemes

Urban development creates a massive change in women's life and through such programmes, they enjoy better social, political, and economic opportunities and freedom. The participation of women in the labour market also increases considerably through urban development programmes. Any country including India would grow economically only through women empowerment (Dhamija et al., 2023). The budget, focuses on urbanization and it specifically provides much importance to Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme for which the government has allotted Rs. 165 crores, the budget itself specifically states that 50 per cent of the scheme's beneficiaries are expected to be women and for their welfare (Balagopal, 2024).

Economic Development Schemes

Every nation's economic development is closely related to the empowerment of women. The foundation for eliminating gender disparity is women's empowerment, since they can significantly contribute to economic growth by using their labour force. Self-employment projects of the Central as well as State projects indicates that the women empowerment initiatives have played a vital role in improving women's economic status as well as the advancement of Indian Economy (Bhoganadam, 2014). The budget 2024-25 also concentrates of improvement labour culture and labour environment of women. The government has budgeted Rs. 8 crores for Social Protection for Un-organized Sector workers and in itself Rs. 6 crore is set apart solely as maternity

allowance for women engaged in the unorganized sector. Further, the government has reserved Rs 17 crores for 'SARANYA' Scheme which is for the empowerment of women who are unemployed, deserted or divorced or unmarried, unwedded mothers, differently abled or poor wives of bedridden patients(Balagopal, 2024).

Women Empowerment in Community Schemes

The progress of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population is another concern of the administration. The government is quite benevolent in ensuring the empowerment of the SC community for which it has budgeted Rs. 51 crores. The government safeguards that 40 per cent of the money will be benefitted by women flock. The Scheme Janani- Janmaraksha is budgeted with Rs. 17 crores which is set apart for the financial assistance of secluded tribe (ST) women at the time of their pregnancy and thereafter. The government also extends its support to the women flock of minority community for their empowerment especially divorcees, widows and deserted women with Rs. 5 crores for initiating self-employment undertakings. The government further contributed in its budget an amount of Rs. 10 crores for the safety and security of women engaged as part of the Social Security Mission. The government supports the Kerala State Women's Commission with Rs. 5.2 crores for the empowerment of women of Kerala the government also visions to be part of the National Nutrition Mission Scheme which aims to improve the nutrition of women and children with Rs. 10 crores(Balagopal, 2024).

This budget includes new initiatives, additional components, and increased funding for already-existing initiatives that specifically target the developmental needs of women.

COMPARISON WITH ALLOCATION FOR WOMEN IN LAST YEARS BUDGET 2023-24.

In 2023-24 budget an amount of ₹4,670.22 crore i.e., 21.12% of the overall Plan outlay was allotted to the women-specific programmes(Balagopal, 2023).

Ten crore rupees have been set up for the execution of several projects under the "NIRBHAYA" initiatives. ₹8.50 crore was allocated to support the ongoing operations of 28 existing POCSO Fast Track Special Courts, as well as the establishment of an additional 28 new courts under the scheme. ₹14 crore was allotted to several initiatives aimed at improving and assessing the execution of several laws and Constitutional provisions pertaining to the protection of women. An extra ₹51 crore has been allotted to the Psychosocial Services Scheme, which was already running in 1012 schools throughout the State, to expand its reach. To promote the use of eco-friendly and cost-effective menstrual cups instead of Sanitary Napkins government had allotted ₹10 crore for conducting awareness programmes and campaigns at the Government level in schools, colleges and workplaces. ₹10 crore was allotted for the activities of Gender Park a unique approach of the Kerala Government initiated in 2013 with a view to create a fair society where individuals of all genders have equitable access to opportunities, resources, and advantages, and where they possess an equal say in crucial decision-making processes that influence their lives, communities, and the broader state(Balagopal, 2023).

Even if Kerala women hold the top position in the literacy rates when it comes to labour participation they are much backward in the National average. Responsibilities of family and child care are keeping away the majority of women from labour participation. To adjust to the new employment culture and to ensure more

women participation in employment State has taken steps to constitute Day Care Centres and creches for old age people and children in collaboration with LSG institution and the people's committee. An amount of ₹10 crore was set apart for the same in 2023-24 budget(Balagopal, 2023).

₹19.30 crore was set apart for various schemes of Kerala State Women's Development Corporation. ₹13 crore was earmarked as a state share for the activities of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme and an amount of ₹194.32 crore is set apart as a State share for the scheme 'Integrated Child Development Service'. An allocation of ₹63.50 crore was designated to ensure that Anganwadi children receive nutritious meals, including the provision of eggs and milk twice a week. An amount of ₹1 crore was also allotted for the construction of Women P.G. Hostel near Kozhikode Medical College (Budget Speech 2023-24)

KSFE has initiated a gold loan scheme, 'Ajayya' with an interest rate of 6% for women. Up to 2023 march ₹374 crore was disbursed to 7907 expatriate entrepreneurs as a loan through the P.B.M.S. scheme implemented in association with NORKA for starting enterprises, to give an impetus to entrepreneurial development and job opportunities(Balagopal, 2023).

The contribution of the State's Gender Budget towards the women-specific schemes in 2024-25 is ₹4,661.51 crore, i.e 21.35% of the overall Plan outlay. This is a 0.23 percentage point increase over the allocation in 2023-24, which was ₹4,670.22 crore i.e 21.12% of the overall Plan outlay. It is worth noting that the Kerala budget 2024-25 is quite benevolent to the cause of women empowerment and earmarking funds to their overall development of women especially to promote their values, attitudes and talents categorized into physical, cultural, cast, intellectual, financial, self, collective and varied ways(Balagopal, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The process of empowering women for the all-around development in their lives is called women empowerment. The very status of women can be uplifted by affording adequate professional education, awareness, training literacy enrichment etc. The gender roles of women are redefined through the process of women empowerment. The empowering process fetches new goals and the same time opportune more freedom to track aspired goals. Empowerment enables them to tackle risk factors in their life environment. The social well-being of women established through self-supportive platforms is the core of women empowerment and the budget provides much reassurance to it. It is a much appreciable fact that even during the tough financial crisis Kerala Government did not undermine the social indicator of women empowerment. 0.23 % increase in the allotment of budget 2024-25 from that of 2023-24 itself shows the Governments high ambition for the empowerment of women of the State. In addition to plans for the state's general growth, the empowerment programme in particular will undoubtedly improve women's status in society. Even while Kerala faces criticism for concentrating on revenue expenditure the State is not ready to compromise developmental objectives and its

tradition of spending on developmental activities which has gained the State the fame of Kerala Model development.

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