KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

TITTY VARGHESE

MAPPING LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AT PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA STATE OF INDIA

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LYDERYSTĖS BRUOŽŲ IR IŠŠŪKIŲ, SUSIJUSIŲ SU MOTERŲ POLITINIŲ GALIŲ SUTEIKIMU PANČAJATO RADŽO INSTITUCIJOSE INDIJOS KERALOS VALSTIJOJE, ANALIZĖ

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INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the research topic

In any culture, gender inequalities are always deep-rooted. Women suffer from a lack of access to decent jobs and face disparities in job segregation and gender pay. In some instances, they are refused to entry proper education and health services and are victims of abuse and bigotry. In governance and economic decision-making systems, in many parts of the world, they are under-represented. Therefore, the UN has listed gender equality as the 5th Sustainable Developmental Goal (Department of Economic and Social Affairs), aiming to achieve gender equality and empowerment globally for all women and girls. For this purpose, the UN has developed a unique promotion #Envision2030 (#Envision2030 Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals, United Nations Enable), which targets gender equality and inclusion that should be attained by 2030. This goal of the UN ensures the maximum and successful representation of women and equal leadership positions in political, economic, and public life, ensuring proper decision-making. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations recognizes the value of gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development and shared future. The UN reaffirms its commitment to ensuring equal rights, access, and opportunities for women to engage and lead in economic, social, and political decision-making processes. It thereby emphasizes that women have a crucial role in achieving sustainable growth. It as well acknowledges that the role of women in leadership is significant for any society's sustainable development. Therefore, the UN is committed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and ensuring their complete and successful involvement in sustainable development policies and decision-making programs (General assembly, 2012, resolution 66/288, annex, paras. 31, 45).

There has been much research on women's empowerment and its significance in the modern century. World Bank recognizes women's empowerment as the main component of the overall growth and development. The Millennium Development Goals (UN IANWGE, 2005) highlighted the gender equality and women's equal rights as an instrument to achieve substantial improvements in emerging nations. Considering female positions, the males relocated and migrated to other countries, regarding convenience, career, or economic conditions. Such male migration creates many alterations in the social system and women's lives, especially in rural areas. However, Kabeer's (1989) notion of women empowerment is associated with power, which means men's power over women and other lives. Kabeer (1999) as well considers the term empowerment to be a multi-dimensional essence of power, indicating that women's autonomy policies must construct on the trust within themselves as a needed element to strengthen their ability to control resources, decide on agendas, and create choices. Women empowerment requires awareness and evaluation of women's abilities and various challenges as well as different methods to encourage their skills and abilities (Mosse, 1994). Such skills cannot be

offered, because they must be self-generated, as it is essential to promote women empowerment programs in various countries.

Lee and Koh (2001) see that the empowerment should be identified as an aspect of perceiving oneself as a competent participant, capable of generating policies. There is a considerable lack of women's political participation and decision-making process in many countries worldwide. Therefore, the need for political empowerment is higher and significant in developing and under-developing nations. For others (Afridi, 2010; Akchurin, Lee, 2013a; Mosedale, 2005a), women empowerment allows women to assume possession of their own lives, create their personal goals, and unite to assist each other in developing governmental requirements for assistance and the overall cultural development. In many cultures, women's function is inseparable from the advancement goal, especially within the household and society, but its significance is less implied in those societies and cultures. Therefore, women could support their significant role in decision-making and improve the life quality. Dutta and Bhakta (2017) find that the word empowerment captures the sense of gaining control when participating in decision-making.

However, there are still some missing fragments in power distribution and decision-making in various societal segments. Hence, Karlekar (2004) states that empowering women through power distribution is necessary for society's development. The inclusion of women in all spheres of decision-making and authority structures is an effective awareness-raising mechanism. It will gradually lead to higher involvement of women and girls in decision-making and society with equal opportunity for personal and overall development. In any community, cultural development without women's social, economic, and political life cannot be regarded as a progressive society. Thus, any country must have different gender balance and empowerment programs. That is why Johnson and Johnson (2001) identify that women's empowerment is a process and a mechanism of various developmental procedures. It covers social, economic, and political development, which increases women's confidence and authority over their own personal and professional life, enabling them to be active in social life. Though women are making a remarkable change in their economic and social spheres, they are segregated continuously from the political participation and leadership, as they do not have access to decision-making. It is vital to identify women's role in political decision-making and public policy when it comes to decision-making.

From Plato to Nozick, Sperling (Sperling, 2001, as cited in Barnett, Hyde, 2001) recognizes an inherent stigma of women's political representation in culture. A transparent glass ceiling inhibits any females on their way to the corridors of power. From the traditional stay-at-home spouse role to a politician, there are many challenges and limitations. The difference in wage, labor, poverty, religious and cultural barriers is the main impediment for women to be active in politics; an institutional approach and a lack of suitable public policy hinder women from being empowered in the political sphere. Such situations reduce women's capacity to enhance and inhibit their interest in coming forward to the political structure. Therefore, it is evident that there is a definite absence of academic and social debate

about women's inequality, as a human rights violation of their political career. Even in Scandinavian parliaments, where the representation is significant, compared to other regions, under-represented women are evident (Randall, 1987).

Women's political empowerment is considered the foundation for all other development in any society, and it experiences many issues, especially in developing countries such as India. In developed countries, women have more opportunities and freedom to participate in political life actively. Due to the deeply embedded cultural, religious, and social attitudes regarding women's role in society, women have many restrictions on decision-making in developing and underdeveloped countries. Women's involvement in the power structure and their political empowerment is still insufficient to analyze women's political participation. In order to increase their involvement at the political level, it is necessary to empower women through various programs via local, national, and community-level action plans. Thus, in most cases, the federal government emerges as an important actor to encourage women's participation in the political sphere by trying to change the society's mindset and creating more conducive platforms for women to be a part of political decision-making (Farre, 2013; Oxaal et al., 1997).

Leadership ability is significantly related to the accessing power. In many places, this power is always associated with one individual or another in an institution, especially with the male gender. Therefore, the political influence and decisions are as well vested in individuals to make policy frameworks beneficial for all genders. However, since women lack their role in having such power positions, there are several incidences where acceptable policy for women's development was neglected or merely nothing when it becomes a policy proposal formulated by the men. In order to include more women in the political sphere, it is essential to have specific rules that allocate more positions based on the seats. The authors, such as Malhotra et al. (2002) and Mayoux (2008), found that power structure operates on distinct levels and hierarchies in different areas. Such a hierarchical concept is as well noticeable in politics. The rise in women's reservation positions has motivated more women to run for political institutions, even though the nation is rigorous in its rigid cultural methods and pushes females to follow their culture. Women's political activism is restricted in the electoral sphere and having a role in decision-making. In India, the national reservation scheme policy intervention with 33% allows females to be a power structure component and increase their political participation (Hazarika, 2011; Nayak, Mahanta, 2009; Singh, 2018). Other countries that are still lacking policies for women's political empowerment should follow this system.

However, there is a disguised concept that economically motivated females are competent in political activities across the national boundaries. Kemp and Berkovitch (2020) point out that many policies focus on women's financial or social development rather than political autonomy. In this context, if women can have more access to power, they will attain more substantial leadership roles and make potential societal development changes. That is why this research is significant in trying to identify women's political leadership and its importance in women's political empowerment.

Scientific novelty

There is a strong and well-developed theoretical background for every sub-topic involved in this dissertation. Various empirical studies have already been conducted within the relevant scope. However, most of the studies used an approach to identify women's empowerment from a social and economic perspective. Therefore, a research gap remained within women empowerment regarding political empowerment through their leadership at the Local Self Government institutions.

It is worth mentioning that the previous empirical studies are most relevant to this dissertation and cover certain specific topics, such as women's social empowerment and the role of economic empowerment to increase women's access to politics (Ghani et al., 2013; Hazarika, 2011; Kadam, 2012; Kantor, 2003; Purushothaman, 1998) and political empowerment (Calman, 2019; Chathukulam, John, 2000; Iyer et al., 2012; Purushothaman, 1998; Rao, 2005). Different scholars (Celis, Lovenduski, 2018; Norris, Inglehart, 2001) find that women have increased perceptions about their position as leaders in politics in the political sphere. Some hope that this development would alter the prevailing political culture, the political plan, and the treatment of women's interests in the public life, and others fear their political empowerment. They as well point out that the consequences of the participation of women in politics do not arise immediately. Still, under some circumstances, they occur and become explicit. In Tinker's (2004) view, women have different life goals and approaches to political participation. Therefore, it is necessary to motivate more women in active involvement in political power. Various authors (Galligan, 2010; Tiessen, 2008; Trimble, Arscott, 2003) claim that due to women's 'natural' or socially formed features, women alter their political structure better. This claim is based on women's identity as mothers, referred to as mother feminism. Therefore, if a woman can transform many daily life perspectives, it should be proposed that women have the power to change the political sphere and its activities as well with a more substantial leadership capacity. Menon (1999) states that the quotas alone will significantly rise in women's representation and help address their challenges, leading to successful participation. The Panchayati Raj Institutions policy has increased women's access to political power in India. Many authors find that the Panchayati Raj Institutions policy has increased the decentralization of power in Indian Local Self Government (Johnson et al., 2005; Mathew, 2003; Palanithurai, 2002; Sharma, 1998). Others identify that it motivates women to be active in political careers (Chattopadhyay, Duflo, 2004; Mathew, 2003; Mohanty, 1995).

Without a powerful leadership capacity at the Local Self Government, it is difficult for women leaders to succeed at their panchayat and attain political empowerment. It is mainly due to the stigma that is existing in Indian society that men are more capable of leadership than women (Lenneberg, 1994; Mies, 1975; Richter, 1990; Spary, 2007). Hence, this dissertation's empirical study tries to identify leadership traits and prove that women at the Local Self Government have a significant leadership in the political sphere, leading to their political empowerment.

Therefore, the novelty of this research is that though there are numerous studies on the importance of women's political participation, there is a lack of

sufficient research on identifying the extent of PRI policy in terms of influencing women's political leadership and how the leadership at the panchayat level is enabling women to empower themselves politically. Moreover, a considerable research gap was observed on the social and cultural challenges of the elected women representatives at the panchayat during their leadership. Besides, few studies have identified the importance of men's role in women's political empowerment and perception. This study considers the perception of elected male representatives at the panchayat, regarding women's political leadership to be significant. Therefore, this research explicitly investigates all these critical objectives and becomes a significant and novel contribution to the existing literature on women's empowerment.

Research problem

Kerala, with 52 percent of the population as women, is a well-known state with a positive male-female ratio. Kerala's sex ratio is 1084 females for every 1000 males, compared to 1058 females in 2001. Interestingly, although the male and female ratios were stable in 1991–2011, it was noteworthy from 963 in 2001 to 959 in 2011. However, as per the 2011 census, the sex ratio of children in Kerala is better than the country's average of 914. Kerala's female literacy rate is 92%, which is among the highest in the Indian states. However, there remains a small gap in the gender role.

Nevertheless, over the past six decades, the gap has been narrowed. One of the most significant challenges that women face in society for their development and leadership is gender bias. Women are less likely to become involved in the labor market than men, and even women are less likely to find jobs in the workplace than men. There are limited opportunities for them to get quality jobs. Women tend to work longer hours than men, even if paid or non-salaried employment positions, and women choose part-time work or only have part-time jobs that are available from limited options. Despite the widespread employment of women across the globe, such gender differences remain. It underscores that many factors regulate women's choices (ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women, 2017). Women in Kerala outperform men in many development indicators. However, the results are not favorable for those involved in the political leadership.

Along with many other indicators, women's political representation is critical in measuring women's status. The aspect of empowerment, measured by the gender inequality index, is a proportion of the women's role as citizens. The Global Gender Disabilities Report, developed by the World Economic Forum, measures political empowerment, opportunity, and role in economic affairs, educational attainment, health, and survival. The achievements in health and education have empowered Kerala's women and enabled them to participate in democracy. While this is an essential requirement for equal democratic citizenship, women must be equally involved in making the right decisions for this to be possible. As a result, women's representation in legal proceedings is essential. The political representation of women should not be limited to voting in elections. Instead, women could place themselves in leadership positions in decision-making, particularly regarding

policies that impact women's lives. Their participation in policymaking empowers women in the State of Kerala.

Women's empowerment has been regarded as the basis for all further growth. India still faces various challenges, particularly concerning women and girl children. In developed countries, women have a more significant opportunity and freedom to participate in a more accessible political sense because of the profoundly integrated cultural, religious, and social views, regarding women's roles in society. However, the strategies to analyze women's empowerment in the political and power structures are still insufficient. Thus, empowering females through multiple local, regional, and national programs is essential to boost their political involvement. In most instances, the federal government arises as a significant actor promoting women's participation in the political sphere. They attempt to alter society's mindset and establish more opportunities for women to make political decision-making (Oxaal et al., 1997; Palley, 2004).

Despite the human development and educational attainment of nations across the globe, it is evident that women who would like to have a substantial role in politics face various hurdles on their way to this career. According to Sen (1993), the structural changes restrict women's choices and autonomy, adversely affecting their wellness and growth. Oh (2016) states that fewer women rulers in South Korea are isolated from the political domain due to the masculine domination as in other industries, such as design, safety, technology, peace, and finance. Furthermore, female politicians assessed and supervised for double standards in Korea were subjected to various gendered assaults, depending on patriarchal prejudices and sexism. In order to generate a culturally feasible condition for females to be involved in the political sphere amid social or other obstacles, it is essential to enforce gender strategies to promote women's political empowerment. As an Asian nation with a rigid religious belief, Bangladesh is as well on the roster of countries where females still need different strategies for promoting political empowerment. The psychological stigma of considering politics as an inappropriate profession for females is very prominent as well. Even though female legal security is much more elaborated than others, females still retain their authority in hand. There are numerous explanations for these developments, especially building solidarity for females by protests, promoting others to vote for women candidates, encouraging other women to meetings and political participation, and establishing distinct polling facilities for females to assist their female applicants in increasing voter turnout (Agbalajobi, 2010; Carroll, 1994; Norris, Inglehart, 2001). Moreover, the educational attainment can boost women's ability to cope with the outside world, including public authorities and multiple decision-making types. In Kerala, women face significant separation and discrimination regarding the decision-making in their public and private lives (Jejeebhoy, Sathar, 2001).

The literature analysis has shown a lack of research on the Panchayati Raj Institution's acts on women's political empowerment in Kerala after 25 years of implementing it. The State Governments should enact legislation to delegate more powers to panchayats in order to ensure greater participation of women in social development planning at the village level and implement the decentralization of

power. Based on the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee and the Administrative Reforms Committee headed by EMS Namboodiripad, the Kerala Panchayat Act of 1960 was enacted and came into force on 01-01-1962. The Act created 922 Gram Panchayats, covering all the State's rural areas completely. In these panchayats, the elected councils came into force with effect from 01-01-1964. This law gave the panchayat governing bodies many rights and provided a splendid basis for the village administration. Some panchayats were converted into municipalities, forming new panchayats, partitioning several larger panchayats. When the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act came into force on 23-4-1994, there were 991 Gram Panchayats. At the moment, the number is 941 (Panchayat Department, Department of Panchayats, Kerala).

The best example is the Local Government of Kerala, which reserves 50% seats for women, including higher positions. Gender empowerment can only be meaningful in politics if women reach higher places, such as parliament and the state legislature. The representation of women in the state legislature and the Indian parliament is still seen as deficient. It is the case throughout the whole India. Surprisingly, the situation of women in Kerala is lower than in many other states and the national average. People are perceived as complementary to each other and acknowledged to develop a society where mutual responsibilities and responsibilities are fulfilled; then, the overall nation's development would move forward culturally and progressively. Family-oriented social order and a mutually agreeable lifestyle do not compromise anyone's rights or challenge freedom. When studying women's political representation in Kerala, women's opportunities and other challenges are pictured. Women's participation has only increased in local bodies due to the Panchayati Raj Institution, but women still are invisible as party leaders. Therefore, it cannot be considered sustainable women's political empowerment when it is realized that it has only happened because of the reservation. Women's role in the leadership or higher positions at the political and social movements has not been conducive, further elaborating the need for further changes.

Furthermore, the violence against women in politics, moral policing, and gender discrimination are still not changed in the social and cultural spheres, which prevents women from pursuing their political leadership for longer terms. Though there are studies on women's political participation at the local self-government, there are few studies that investigate the political leadership at the local self-government for women who enter into the leadership through PRI policy, the related social and cultural challenges these women face at their LSG, and the male perspectives on women's political leadership at the LSG. There is a need to investigate women's political empowerment at the LSG by identifying their political leadership traits, various challenges they face during their leadership, and the male representative's perception of women political leaders.

Therefore, this dissertation's research problem is as follows: what are the characteristics of women's political leadership and what challenges are faced.

The aim of the dissertation

This dissertation aims to investigate women's political empowerment through the leadership at the Local Self-Government (LSG) institutions in Kerala.

The object of the research is women's political empowerment through leadership.

Research objectives

This research applies to a case study in order to determine the political empowerment of the elected women in local self-governance through their leadership. It covers the PRI policy impact on women's political leadership in one district's panchayat from Kerala, i.e., Idukki. The Panchayati Raj Institution policy enabled more women into political institutes, especially local self-government. The paper examined the elected women politicians' opportunities due to the Panchayati Raj Institution policy reservation system and observed how they could be successful politicians in their society. Through the extensive discussion on the dissemination and management of power associated with them in the panchayats, the image created in the community as influential women politicians, their participation in various policy decisions at the respective panchayats were identified. The descriptive type of the case study helps to understand the phenomena under study and reveals the multiple challenges that the women leaders face during their leadership time at the panchayat. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the interaction of the elected women at the administrative wing as the authority figure in the panchayat and reveal various social and political challenges they face while making policy decisions.

The four main objectives of this research are given below:

1. To conceptualize women's political empowerment at the local self-government;

2. To identify elected women representatives leadership traits and analyze how it strengthens their political leadership at the panchayat;

3. To analyze the social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership at the panchayat;

4. To analyze men's perceptions on women's political leadership at the panchayat.

It as well provides discussion, conclusions of the research, and recommendations for potential future research.

Defended theses in the doctoral dissertation

1) Panchayati Raj policies ensure women's importance in India. The participation in politics empowers women and gives them equal voice in formal and informal decision-making. Making political decisions while working for the marginalized society is essential. Women leaders will be able to implement development policies in all local bodies and panchayats, regardless of their political background or experience. The citizens and local governments interact in two-way communication, developing information and responsiveness. Thus, the Panchayati Raj Institutions policy will allow more opportunities for women leaders to lead.

2) Women leaders in panchayats have strong leadership traits and are politically empowered due to their intelligence, confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. In addition, they have influenced society and other governing sections through their participation in politics and panchayat decision-making.

3) Women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions face social and cultural challenges. Most of these issues stem from patriarchy, sexism, economic disparity, lack of access to equal opportunities, lack of respect, lack of support from family, lack of mentors in politics, partisanship, lack of safety, interference from other political and religious organizations, lack of time and stress. These issues influenced some leaders and prevented them from running in future elections.

4) Male elected representatives at the panchayat accept and agree on the importance of women's political empowerment and leadership. They believe men should do more to encourage women's political participation. Men's activities and promotion ideas should as well empower women in politics. They as well acknowledge that women have superior organizational skills and can govern as effectively as men. However, male leaders identify that a female leader face financial constraints, preventing them from pursuing a political career or other jobs.

Methods

The Panchayati Raj Institution act is an essential milestone for women's political leadership at the Local Self Government. Therefore, in order to determine the four main objectives, this research uses a qualitative methodology, document analysis of various governmental documents, and empirical analysis through interviews with elected women and men representatives. In Merriam's (2009) views, the qualitative researchers aim to understand the meaning that people connect to their experiences using a tool that looks at their lived experiences. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a qualitative study is a multi-method approach, incorporating qualitative, quantitative, and ethnographic approaches. In qualitative research, the researchers use natural environments, often attempting to explain or make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings people give to them. They have noted that qualitative research includes studies using and selecting various empirical materials, such as a case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, analytical, historical, interactional, and visual texts that explain routine and problematic moment meanings in individual's lives. Qualitative research, such as participant observation and case studies, provides a comprehensive overview of the environment or practice (Rahman, 2016). The scholars (Ezzy, 2013; Qureshi, 2018; Thorne, 2000) have noted that almost all qualitative research types are inductive and versatile and can be incorporated into the research design by implementing a theoretical sampling strategy. Therefore, this dissertation uses a qualitative methodology to find out the objectives with suitable document analysis.

First, in order to conceptualize the women's political empowerment through leadership at the Local Self Government, the research used secondary data analysis about the Panchayati Raj Institution policy, its dimensions, and regulation by referring to the policy issued by the Government of India. It as well used various literature and previous studies on PRI policy's role of women's empowerment in

India by national and international scholars. A qualitative document analysis was performed during 2018–2019. PRI's role in women's political empowerment was identified, and the roles and responsibilities of women politicians at the panchayat were assessed.

In order to study the objectives 2–4, this research used an empirical study. This research primary used the data that was collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 elected women representatives at the panchayat from one district in Kerala to conduct the empirical research and identify the leadership traits of elected women representatives, analyze how it strengthens their political leadership at the panchayat, and study the social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership at the panchayat. They were the presidents of the panchayats from 2015–2020 October. This research collected primary data through semi-structured interviews with 15 elected male representatives from different panchayats in the Idukki district to identify men's perception of women's leadership at the Local Self Government. In total, 40 respondents participated in the empirical study. While interviewing with respondents, the author was able to identify their way of day-to-day activities at the panchayat and how they are administering their duties and responsibilities.

All the interview sessions were recorded with a smartphone or noted as per the interview questionnaire to the elected women representatives and elected male representatives at the selected panchayats. All the subjects of the research were aware of that. Each participant as well had to provide their socio-demographic information during the interview. In order to analyze all the gathered data (from the interview session and the socio-demographic questionnaire), MAXQDA software was used to process the qualitative data. Most of the results are qualitative to explain the subjective aspects as mechanisms to identify the perception of elected women's political leadership at the Local Self Government and men's role in women's political empowerment. In order to develop the literature review and various text analyses, MAXQDA was effectively used in this dissertation. The main keywords are women empowerment, political empowerment, leadership, public policy in India, feminism in India, political participation, local self-government, panchayat, Panchayati raj institutions' policy, and women's Kerala that were used to find out various scholarly as well as legal documents for this study.

The results revealed that the Panchayati Raj Institution policies are essential public policy, ensuring more women's political participation and joining the political sphere as an important decision-maker for the democratic governmental system, thereby increasing political leadership access. Women were able to attain political empowerment through such political leadership. However, they are facing various social and cultural challenges. In fact, the male elected representatives have a solid positive gender equality approach in terms of women's political leadership. They believe that women are getting the chance to be politically empowered through the PRI policy.

Practical implications

The women's political leadership at the panchayat enabled them to access power and decision-making capacity in the political realm. They are thereby empowered in the political sphere. The results have shown that women president's leadership traits, such as ability, charisma, conscientization, efficacy, influence, and participation, contributed to their political empowerment. In a panchayat administration, a woman leader must possess leadership qualities, as mentioned above. It enables them with a better access to the decision-making on various areas at their panchayat of funding allocation, project sanctioning, developmental programs, implementation of various state and national projects, distribution of housing facilities for low-income groups, providing educational support for the children at their panchayat, and ensuring the protection of women, girls, and older adults. The study as well points out that the cooperation between other elected representatives of the panchayat administration to fully provide their leadership is essential. It as well shows that sometimes, their leadership is required to agree or disagree with the party leadership instructions that they represent if they are a part of any political party affiliation. As a leader, a woman representative must take suitable decisions with utmost transparency and not let others interfere in their panchayat governance. Otherwise, people will lose their trust in women's leadership in society. The study revealed various social and cultural challenges for their leadership, which leads to a lack of sufficient political empowerment. One of the key issues is gender stereotyping, which is still prominent in society, especially in Kerala. The study as well has found that the elected male representatives at the panchayat, women leader's colleagues, show a positive outlook on women's leadership and accept their governance abilities. Male colleagues revealed they are convinced and satisfied with how a woman leader guides them and shows progressive leadership for their panchayat's overall welfare. This is a significant and relevant result that indicates a male's acceptance and support in a direction. They as well believe that more women will attain political empowerment and create gender equality through such powerful positions.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of the following sections: introduction, three main chapters (theoretical, methodological, and empirical), conclusions, and discussion. The volume of the dissertation is 250 pages. It contains 17 figures, 17 tables and 3 annexes. The list of references features 412 references.

This dissertation does have four objectives. Chapter 1 covers the theoretical framework of women's political empowerment. It includes theoretical perspectives on the concept of women's empowerment. Since empowerment consists of three types, it as well explains economic empowerment, social empowerment, and political empowerment. Therefore, this chapter explains four theories to investigate the objectives: participation and democratic theory, leadership theory, and liberal feminism and theory of intersectional feminism. It as well describes the political empowerment context, its importance, various political empowerment features, why

it is essential and analyzes women's political empowerment globally. It ends with a concept map for this dissertation.

Chapter 2 covers the research methodology adopted for this dissertation. The principal method for the fulfillment of this dissertation is based on the qualitative method. Therefore, this chapter explains various strategies used for each objective. For the first objective, the dissertation used qualitative document analysis. The researcher used an empirical study for the second, third, and fourth objectives. Therefore, the details about the data selection and sampling, interview strategies, sampling method, respondent's profile, etc. were explained.

Chapter 3 covers the results of the empirical study. It covers the women's empowerment in India, the features of political empowerment of women in India, the importance of the Panchayati Raj Institutions policy for women's political empowerment, the understanding of women's leadership in the context of Kerala, identifying the features of political participation of women at renaissance movements in Kerala. Then, it discusses the results obtained from the empirical study, for the objectives 1–4, such as the political empowerment of women in Kerala through Panchayati raj institutions, the leadership traits of the elected women representatives, social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership, and men's perspective on women in political leadership.

Chapter 4 covers the conclusion of the dissertation. Then, the directions for further research and the list of references, list of scientific publications, acknowledgment, and the annexes are provided which include the interviewee's consent form, and questionnaires given to the elected female and male representatives.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

This chapter comprehensively analyzes women's empowerment in the economic, social, and political spheres.

1.1. The concept and types of women's empowerment

The United Nations (OHCHR) claims that women's empowerment consists of women's self-sense worth, freedom to have decisions, right to access opportunities and resources, freedom to have the authority to regulate their own life both inside and outside the house. Women empowerment is the increasing power of the deprived section of the society to higher development. In this dissertation, women are considered the deprived section of the community. They are encouraged to participate in political, social, and economic development through various institutional policies, thereby moving to a higher development section. The scholars (Aziz et al., 2011; Porter, 2013; Sharma, 2017) found that empowerment is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process that enables women to realize their whole identity and power in all spheres of life. It creates the idea of developing people who are considered underprivileged or suffer from social distress and need to develop the front line.

Compared to many feminists and development experts' ideology, Sharma (2000) showed a distinct stigma of female participation. However, their capacity to impact the social change path establishes a more just cultural and financial balance between domestic and public life. In his view, women's empowerment could as well threaten national harmony, as it may push a wedge between males and females. Many females do not support this view; because they think that they are well-adjusted and discover nothing incorrect with gender relationships. From the structural point of view, the women's empowerment approach is intrinsically psychological, structural, and elitist. There is a different discourse on Sharma's perspective on women's empowerment. He disagrees with the idea of women's emancipation and development as the central aspect of the society, critically evaluated and re-corrected.

Women's empowerment could not be regarded as an element of a psychological perspective, but it should be discussed in the worldly context. Women's empowerment includes modifications in the law, constitutional command, ownership and inheritance freedoms, and power over women's life and labor. Such kind of changes will influence and make a positive outlook on women's lives. Therefore, they will be able to engage in developmental activities more. The scholars, such as Alexander et al. (2016), Burke et al. (2019), and Lyngdoh and Pati (2013), found that female empowerment will decrease the discrimination rates and increase women's decision-making efficiency. In many parts of the world, women reside in the household and take care of their house responsibilities, e.g., cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly, rather than finding a job or economic activities. Thereby, their freedom to have access and individual liberty are

stigmatized in many ways. A study by Cinar and Kose (2018) found that the improved access to microfinance can empower women economically. Although the results varied, the research stated that most customers' earnings and profits improved after the microfinance was delivered. Shingla and Singh (2015) discovered a convincing proof in Ghana that microfinance would contribute to female empowerment. Women have improved self-confidence, self-esteem, and enhanced involvement in decision-making. They have discovered that women's input made them gain higher regard and recognition from their kids and spouse. They as well found some constraints on empowerment, including the shift in women's social status, restricted decision-making authority to purchases or other choices. In India, various micro-financing policies had increased and motivated women to engage in economic activities and increase their income and social skills.

Other authors (Beteta, 2006; Bexell, 2012) found that women's empowerment that is seen in discourses and practices that constitute empowerment is likely embedded and represent material spaces. However, the studies must be done, regarding women's access to social, cultural, and political participation, since these aspects are crucial for women's gender equality and welfare. Sirivardana (2009) believes that it must include assistance from a popular perspective for women's empowerment. Therefore, it needs social mobilization to reconvert the aid scheme and re-mold its employees vulnerable to being pro-poor. In catalysts, the task is to train facilitator trainers and internal facilitators, because they are needed in substantial numbers. It is an entirely complicated method. It is called the practice of social mobilization. Since social mobilization increases the participation in democracy, it can as well be considered as a process of participatory development that goes with it. It will result in a situation where the poor can build their organizations to contribute to the growth and human development with more significant equity in distributing results. It focuses on the visual proof that the rich are efficient. This accumulation process is accompanied by empowering the poor and building self-help organizations and new countervailing social movements that reinforce democracy and are positively transformative.

Sen (2013) sees the concept of empowerment from a financial pointed view. It is believed that people's well-being involves participating in various liberties, including practicing one's authority. One method to embed a certain organization includes education for transformative purposes rather than merely financial reasons. That is why they point out that social protection strategies must comprise measures and programs aimed at reducing poverty and dependence by demonstrating an active labor market, reducing people's risk visibility, and improving their ability to defend themselves against hazards and earnings interruptions. Since micro-crediting programs empower females in India, such programs are commonly used as an excuse for using valuable and remarkable micro-credit programs. Since women's empowerment involves gender roles and gender equality, the knowledge of these elements is essential, and then, only the significance of political empowerment is recognized. As Mosedale (2005b) identified, although women's role has changed from ancient to the 21st century, women's representation in advertising and

television is still being questioned. They are still viewed as an object of sensual pleasures.

Below given figure shows models of women empowerment. It is essential to have a social background for women in the economic, social, and political sectors to empower women. In some countries, especially in Asia, there are many restrictions on women getting out of the house and doing different work, especially in religious societies. Therefore, women can achieve social upliftment only if various agency resources are practiced socially, economically, and politically. Freedom is the fact that needs close attention, especially concerning women, since women can advance in various social, economic, and political fields, thus achieving all kinds of developmental roles in the social context in which they live.
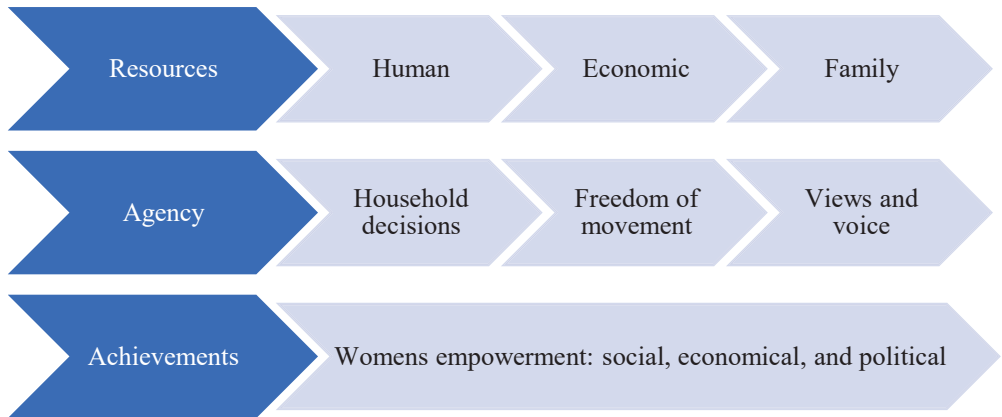
Figure 1. Models of women empowerment

Source: adapted from Kabeer, 1999

Over the centuries, there has been a socio-cultural shift in culture that is apparent from the growing number of females that are seeking professions, the evolving nature of household positions, and females' negative stance towards the traditional sex-role stereotypes, which are particularly sensitive to the gender-role stereotyping in Western nations (Johnson et al., 2009; Yao, Zhou, 2011). In India's television advertisements on gender roles, women are portrayed as characters related to the household items, kitchen utensils, baby food. It typically gives the impression that women are meant to be women and confined to the household. In Nielsen's (2017) opinion, the concept of gender and gender relations is that people express and act according to the socially acclaimed norms and rules and cannot be hereditary. It shows that social behaviors shape human reactions and gender reflections. One of the essential elements of gender bias and gender discrimination can be seen in the education sector, which prohibits women from pursuing higher education and scientific recognition, thereby decreasing their educational structure involvement.

Another significant factor for the gender bias in a career is the family structure. Women who are employed find it difficult to progress in their jobs due to the children and family relations. Men are traditionally believed to be the

breadwinners and continued with the same propositions. Even though there is a less empirical basis, women can have a tremendous institutional impact, concerning administrative and managerial positions, if they have a higher education. Moreover, they can make significant changes due to their intuitive abilities, practical experiences, dealing with complex situations, and multi-tasking and decision-making abilities. Another principal factor for female advancement is women's leadership at the administrative and managerial levels, leading to women's advancement. According to Batra and Reio (2016), gender inequality and related problems are confined to economic issues or access to the education and employment. However, culture, religion, historical elements, and background in socially constructed relationships play a vital role as well. The component of the gender equality takes prime importance, as it enables and forms the country's growth and wealth, particularly with India's situation as a developing nation in the world context. One considerable gender discrimination is significantly sensed in the workforce where necessary modifications need to be introduced with the assistance of human resource development staff, enhancing the position and decreasing the gender gap. However, it requires constant attempts from human resource development and other performers, as gender inequality is embedded in the Indian social fabric, including household relationships.

The concept of masculine domination and women's subordination, which has been socially constructed over millennia, has enabled this situation. Although there has been development in various sectors, such as education, living standards, and access to the basic needs, it has not been legally distributed among the gender arenas. Arora (2012) identifies a significant difference in the allocation of work between men and women at the workplace. In many households, men are portrayed as breadwinners, and women are subjected to the household activities and take care of family activities that provide little recognition due to the patriarchal and historical nature of Indian society. Individual needs and priorities are sacrificed for the family's needs in India, which increase gender inequality. Due to this, women's poverty and lack of access to resources become an element of patriarchal violence. It lowers women's capability to support kids and family and merely becomes a person taking care of the husband's requirements and is obliged to his regulations. The notion of patriarchy even impedes women's financial ownership, e.g., dowry ownership, although the dowry system is legally banned.

This type of patriarchy avoids women's financial, social, educational, linguistic, and spiritual participation and prohibits displaying related abilities. Another essential element that is connected with the gender inequality is gender depiction and the employment relationship. Many businesses tend to hire men over women, as they consider it less profitable and economical to employ women workforce due to the multiple contingencies connected with the women workforce, such as pregnancy and compensated maternity pay. Moreover, the male-dominated hierarchical systems of jobs tend to provide bonuses and rewards to men peers rather than women co-workers. The gender wage gap situation, owing to men's preferential therapy, as well shows the incidences of gender inequality. Moreover, the females are restricted by the family due to the patriarchal behavior. The concept that males

are expected to be the breadwinners, the country's financial advancement is stopped or stagnated, as one gender's economic activity could not deliver its overall financial success (Razavi, 2016).

Chand et al. (2015) identify an essential element depicting that the gender inequality is the preferential therapy that is provided to children and males over girls and female children over food and nutrition. Some families prefer to give males more education than girls, and the girls frequently receive primary or secondary education. The patriarchal nature of society views women as being confined to the household through marriage, thus speeding up higher education money as a financial burden on the family. They tend to invest cash in education for the male kid as they are deemed breadwinners and prospective applicants in the marriage industry, enabling them to get high dowry and other advantages.

The World Bank (Alsop et al., 2005) describes empowerment as growing people or communities' ability to create decisions and convert those decisions into required behavior and results. Women's empowerment is viewed as a multi-dimensional system that should allow people or organizations to do that. There are primarily three fields where females need empowerment, such as social, financial, and political autonomy (Annan et al., 2020; Laszlo et al., 2020), and hence, the inclusion is necessary. According to Aspy and Sandhu (1999), inclusion is the method by which individuals, who are helpless or become aware of the power dynamics of the job in their system of life, develop the skills and capacity to obtain some fair influence over their lives, which they practice without infringing the freedoms of others; thus, women's inherent power and favorable self-image will be promoted.

Types of women empowerments

Most researches used the term empowerment to empower communities or people. Numerous programs worldwide empower natural capacities that fully engage in their growth, thereby building society's capacity. It includes various programs to eradicate poverty, prevent violence against women, provide asylum, and give charity aid to the necessary nations. They are regarded as multiple forms of empowerment. Such empowerment activities require efficiency and open-minded practices for their success (Bonilla et al., 2017; Kosec et al., 2021). Society empowerment through NGO's activities is prominent across the globe in every country. High-Pippert and Comer (1998) see alternative growth theory from the notion of empowerment, which encompasses its political and cultural aspects. They mean that there are three primary types of authority: personal, political, and psychological. Social power involves knowledge, information, and skills, while political power involves mechanisms that influence policy changes at the macro and micro levels. Women's empowerment is a mechanism, whereby women will mobilize themselves to increase their self-reliance, demonstrate their autonomous right to make decisions, and manage the wealth that will help to question and eradicate their subordination (Keller, Mbewe, 1991). The empowerment process applies to the one's strength. Jayaweera (1997) as well explained empowerment as a

mechanism for developing resource management and gaining decision-making and execution capability and opportunity.

Empowerment means giving power to the helpless in a specific situation or circumstances. In the UNDP Human Development Research in 1995 (Human Development Report, 1995), women's empowerment was described as extending women's options and capacity to make choices. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) emphasize that empowerment is required as well to have access to the decision-making power. Kabeer (2005) argued that women's empowerment is a dynamic growth phenomenon but not wider than the social inclusion. Many researchers (Akinsanya, 2011; Malik, Courtney, 2011; Shah, Khurshid, 2019; Zhao, 2011) identified the importance of women's education for their overall empowerment. She says that women's empowerment makes them more informed, politically engaged, socially prosperous, and autonomous individuals who can make wise choices on issues that concern them and their nations. A woman is motivated to have income, education, social status, expertise, etc., command, and access structured financial services.

Economic empowerment

It is essential to understand how economic empowerment operates in every community for the overall societal development. Different authors (Chhay, 2011; Hendriks, 2019; Rao et al., 2014; Rimmer, 2017) believe that the salary inclusion implies economic empowerment. Females will be prepared to earn more salaries and have financial freedom and growth through job chances. Thus, the economic empowerment is seen as a reliable instrument against poverty and a tool for self-motivation. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) identifies women's economic empowerment to liberate oppressed individuals from all poverty repression types in India. They can immediately appreciate economies and households; they can readily manage and make nutritious meals accessible and meet fundamental demands. Economic empowerment is about making females conscious of their position or significance in economic development, providing them with room for financial independence and accounting for their essential contributors to the manufacturing system. It is a method and a phase to be reached by developing policies that focus on constructing creditworthiness and financial independence among females by reducing all gender-specific obstacles that prevent females from entering their legitimate part in every sphere of existence.

According to the views of Narayanan and Das (2014), females who have been the receivers of financial distribution programs and non-formal education programs highlight politics, corruption, and poverty as the major structural problems that hinder women's entry to education. Changing conventional institutions is a necessary component of female participation, affecting ideologies and improving women's access to the commanding assets. Rowlands (1995) suggests that efficient empowerment pushes helpless individuals to become aware of the dynamics of authority in their life, develops abilities and expertise to acquire control, use control positively, and encourages others to participate in the phase of empowering wider society. Thus, Luttrell et al. (2007) believe that women's empowerment is crucial

because they are the necessary force to separate integrational reproduction and patriarchal authority. Mayoux (1998) suggests that women's involvement in organizations advocated as the primary form of enhancing economic sustainability, while at the same moment assuming that they are automatically empowered to explain every virtue. Sen and Mukherjee (2014) have found an intrinsic conflict between the desirability of women's education in India and the limitations imposed on them by preserving social institutions and ideologies such as patriarchy.

According to Duflo (2012), when it comes to the aspect of women's economic empowerment, a new body of literature and academic studies are now focusing on the aspect of women's economic empowerment from the perspective of their salaries or wages as well as the point of the quality that it entitles to woman when it comes to the aspect of economic empowerment. This can ensure that women have economic empowerment in terms of salary or wages, managing those finances, and proper control over those financial and monetary aspects. This can be in their control of financial regulation, such as personal bank accounts and digital payment mechanisms.

Another group of academicians (Ellis, 1843; Meyerowitz, 1993) argued that there should be assigned more credit to the woman for their work and duties, which they have to carry forward by managing both household and professional aspects and formulate mechanisms to reduce and eliminate the division between genders, especially concerning economic matters. One of the significant developments is the formulation of Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for "gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" (World Bank, 2004). One of the significant aspects of this is the true collaboration between the government and the NGO's or grassroots levels through which women's economic empowerment can be ensured, thereby alleviating inequality and hunger. Moreover, other studies show a higher disparity, especially in the work-related aspects, such as restricted mobility, massive difference between income, inadequate and insufficient transmission of expertise, and high illiteracy, which acts as an inhibiting aspect for women empowerment (Burke et al., 2019). When women become productive and use their alternative mechanisms to find a means of living, they enhance their empowerment (Sharp et al., 2003). It has to be noted that it is not only about employment and getting a salary, but when it comes to the aspect of the management of household and concerning the economic self-reliance and independence, it can be seen as significant factors, which show the role of empowerment for woman at the household level (Kabeer, 2005).

Therefore, Vinkenburg (2015) argues that in order to enhance woman's empowerment and equality, one of the significant aspects is the transfer of knowledge or the transmission of know-how, irrespective of gender, thereby enabling woman to get educated and having professional expertise when it comes to the aspect of employment. Through this, it enables to overcome the economical hurdles, which women were facing in the society, e.g., unequal pay and subordination or subjugation of both at the professional and domestic level. Thus, a proper reorientation of these systems can ensure and enhance women's empowerment and equality. One of the significant obstructing factors for women's

economic and political development is the existing socio-cultural and legal system that favors inequality and promotes male domination. Therefore, a proper restructuring of the existing legal and political system can provide more insights and enhance freedom and equality regarding women's political and social-economic development and empowerment (Unterhalter, 2005).

According to some of the most prominent authors who argued that one of the significant mechanisms for women to get out of an abusive relationship or subordination both in society and within the family is to get them educated and employed, thereby ensuring economic stability and independence, which facilitate other social, political, and cultural independence (Hallward-Driemeier, Hasan, 2012; Jensen, 2008; Žarković-Rakić, Vladisavljević, 2016). However, another group of scholars believes that the abuse and exploitation in the household and society facilitated women's way of thinking about their rights and is moving towards various aspects of empowerment. One of the significant landmarks for woman empowerment can be seen in the form of Beijing resolution (Beijing Conference, n.d.) by the United Nations, which recommended that women's economic equality should be a primary factor for preventive mechanisms towards violence against women. Another form of literature, such as fertility demographic literature, states that the woman's role and independence regarding abortion and family planning can be seen as another effective mechanism that ensures women empowerment and independence (Das, Tarai, 2011; Hindin, 2000). The UN women's economic empowerment (UN Women, 2018) as well emphasized the collective human responsibility for ensuring women's economic, social, and cultural rights and empowerment.

Another significant economic development is looking at the aspect of woman economic empowerment, which will facilitate women having reproductive empowerment as economic independence can ensure financial stability for women, thereby raising their voice towards their reproductive mechanisms. Through this mechanism, the woman will have a say regarding the family planning and the decision regarding abortion and other reproductive mechanisms, which will ensure the woman's reproductive health and emotional, psychological, and mental health. It implies the need for an all-inclusive educational system that orientates towards the need for a comprehensive approach to reproductive mechanisms. One of the significant aspects in this regard is the lack of family planning mechanisms, especially towards women. That decision regarding family planning is primarily due to the male patriarchal mindset in the family system. Thus, through the family planning mechanism, woman will have a say and right regarding their aspect of reproduction and reproductive mechanisms.

Thus, as stated before, the economic independence significantly impacts their decision-making abilities and reproductive independence, especially regarding family planning and abortion. Women's economic empowerment enables women and children have economic independence, thereby having a say in the family planning mechanisms and other aspects (Usha, 2005; Oláh et al., 2018). This mechanism ensures their right over their body and mind; thus, only facilitating the

times that are appropriate for their mind and body, ensuring physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Cleland, Rodriguez, 1988; Jejeebhoy, 1995).

Furthermore, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs identifies women's social empowerment and economic development as positively related to the education and employment (Gokhale et al., 2004). Female literacy was associated with lower child mortality but could proxy other factors, such as income or health care use. Moreover, the higher is the distribution divisions of income, the lower is the proportion of women working for cash in the workforce. Linnemayr et al. (2008) found that adult women's bargaining power was a decisive factor in Senegal's infant nutrition increase. This fact suggests that the empowerment of a mother would give her kids the highest nutritional consistency. At the personal level, getting a well-paying job is a critical factor that provides a woman with the financial resources, decreases economic dependency, and enhances resource independence, contributing to the empowerment. Moreover, the partial powers stand for women who are mindful of their rights. This situation illustrates that paying employment for women does not guarantee that they will be encouraged if their income is not regulated. The studies focus on the land/property rights that play a significant role in women's empowerment, particularly economic empowerment. The literature indicates that numerous researchers are using a multi-dimensional aging lens. There is an observational proof of the age role in raising women's economic equality in most studies. Women under the age of 20 are less likely to be motivated than women between 40 and 44 in the financial decision-making, household decision-making, physical mobility (Mason, Smith, 2012), and leverage over the cash income (economic empowerment) (Nayak, Mahanta, 2009).

Social empowerment

Social empowerment implies an equal social status of females in culture because any human society's principal obligation is to guarantee human dignity for all employees. It is often asserted that promoting women's access to finances is not efficient to obtain women's empowerment, unless connected to other types of operations, such as educational development and workforce participation (Ferguson, Kepe, 2011; Rappapon, 1984). Women's education is strongly linked with their social empowerment level, and greater social empowerment probabilities are associated with higher education. Empowerment ensures that all parts of society have equal influence over their lives, make essential choices, and have equal opportunities. Without equally encouraging all aspects of culture, a country cannot have a strong development trajectory. The empowerment principle plays a crucial role (Amudha, Banu, 2009; Crondahl, Eklund Karlsson, 2015; Miles, 2016). This term requires gender equity. Modernizing sustainability would require re-evaluating the definition and extending it to several aspects of human life. The notion of empowerment for many people includes assorted items, such as independence, organization, capability, contribution, self-sufficiency, and enhanced capital, as almost all concepts associated with social empowerment.

Social empowerment is provided by eliminating social, governmental, legal, and economic obstacles to individual control. Many women that joined the

workforce gain more nominal wages than men and have less growth potential (Goldin, 2014; Kirby et al., 2003). Women have always had a secondary function in the family and culture and are consciously battling gender inequality (Bhuyan, 2006; Bhuyan et al., 2019). Women should have access to the opportunities and involvement in the decision-making and sometimes increase women's influence over their lives. Therefore, they will identify women's equality as a threat to men's power (Oxaal et al., 1997).

Women's social empowerment is visualized as a function of human growth, obtained by schooling, training, access to material services, etc. From this point of view, systemic adjustment can result naturally from personal modification. However, a man is seen as a part of society, and the reform is considered unlikely until societal systems linked to the political influence are altered. The concentration on one or two aspects of empowerment is inadequate for meaningful progress (Pigg, 2002). The creation is not just about the individuals; they must contribute to it. People should consciously engage in their lives' choices and acts. Investing and encouraging women to make their selection is significant and contributes to the economic growth and development. Personal and systemic change is closely correlated with inner life cycles, social environment, and the environment exerts a profound impact on one's well-being. Empowerment relies on and leads to a framework where various players are given tools that are required to make a specific contribution to the whole. From this conception, it can be found that individual and social empowerment can be regarded as expanding the imagination, capability, and choice required for people to serve as active agents of human well-being and affluence (Malapit et al., 2015; Moghadam, Senftova, 2005). Women can recognize their rights better through higher education, make more appropriate household decisions, and have a degree of bargaining power. Household income is often correlated favorably with a greater possibility of social empowerment. Women in the technical, manufacturing, and service industries tend to have a greater social upliftment probability, whereas self-employed women in the agricultural sector were placed in the base category (Arul Paramanandam, Packirisamy, 2015; Seymour, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to encourage social empowerment schemes for women in every society; thus, transparent and efficient policy mechanisms are essential.

For women to be active in political leadership and thereby empower themselves in the political arena, women need economic and social empowerment, as it could be seen from the description above. Without fulfilling those, it will be hard for women to have political empowerment. In order to achieve women's economic and social empowerment, they must have political power to influence various policies, creating more opportunities. Thus, economic and social empowerment as well relies on the political empowerment. That is why OECD said that "the poor need to participate in and influence the policy reform process that goes with poverty reduction strategies. Approaches are needed to increase the voice and influence of poor women and men so that policymaking is accountable to the actual needs of the poor". It as well views that it is important to identify how the state implements pro-poor development policies to enhance women's development,

depending on how it decides on the policymaking and holds policymakers accountable. Hence, the importance of political empowerment and its features should be identified.

Political empowerment of women

Political empowerment in a male-dominated social context can be understood as a distribution of various sources of power, such as resources, capabilities, and positions to the powerless and subordinated (ref. Dovile Budryte). Political empowerment requires elimination of structural inequality and inclusive participation in democratic decision-making processes (Mahmood, 2001; Rodwell, 1996; Shami, 2009). Any democratic empowerment would entail a marginalized community's access to multiple political roles, including cabinet seats. This focuses on the entrance to leadership and power in the decision-making role for women in governance. The UN Women (2018) identify that for gender equality and sustainable development, women's rights to engage in public life and exercise their political rights equally are vital. Both represent civil rights and are inclusive government provisions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2015) sets down the values of non-discrimination and equitable enjoyment of political rights, including women and men right to serve in their country's democracy. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW, 1954) explicitly guarantees women's freedom to operate in their country's democracy and access public services. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 1994) points out that women's political empowerment has proved to be good for economic and social growth worldwide to expand women's leadership and decision-making involvement. The studies have found that longer attention to women's electoral representation increases women's relative participation in the economy, the share of women's public job opportunities, and women's access to public facilities, such as education and health care.

Women's leadership and electoral engagement were limited from the local to the global level. Women are under-represented both as candidates and in leadership positions, in public government, civil services, private life, or academia, especially in developing and underdeveloped nations. This happens because of their demonstrated skills as politicians and agents of reform and their right to engage in democratic government legally. In order to engage in political life, women face many hurdles. Due to the patriarchal laws and institutions, systemic inequalities as well hinder women's chances to run for the office. The capacity differences mean that women are less likely to have the preparation, connections, and tools that are required to become successful leaders, compared to men. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2020) study presents global rankings for women in executive, government, and parliamentary roles.

Figure 2 shows the portfolio held by women ministers in 190 countries, according to the woman and ministerial position (UN Woman, 2020). From this narrative, when looking at the country samples, the largest portfolio held by women ministers comes into the category of family/children/youth/elderly/disabled, social affairs, environment/natural resources/energy, employment/labor/vocational

training, woman affairs/gender equality, culture, trade, education, and public works. In contrast, in the category of parliamentary affairs, information and media, population, transport, human rights, defense, and the category of the finance department, the representation of women in all these 190 countries show less significance and less representation, compared to the categories mentioned above. This shows gender categorization when allocating ministerial positions as important portfolios, e.g., finance, defense transport, and other prominent sectors, were held by the male ministers. In contrast, less significant positions, such as family welfare, social affairs, environment, employment, and others, were held by a woman or allocated to women. This shows the gender categorization of ministerial positions in various countries across the world.
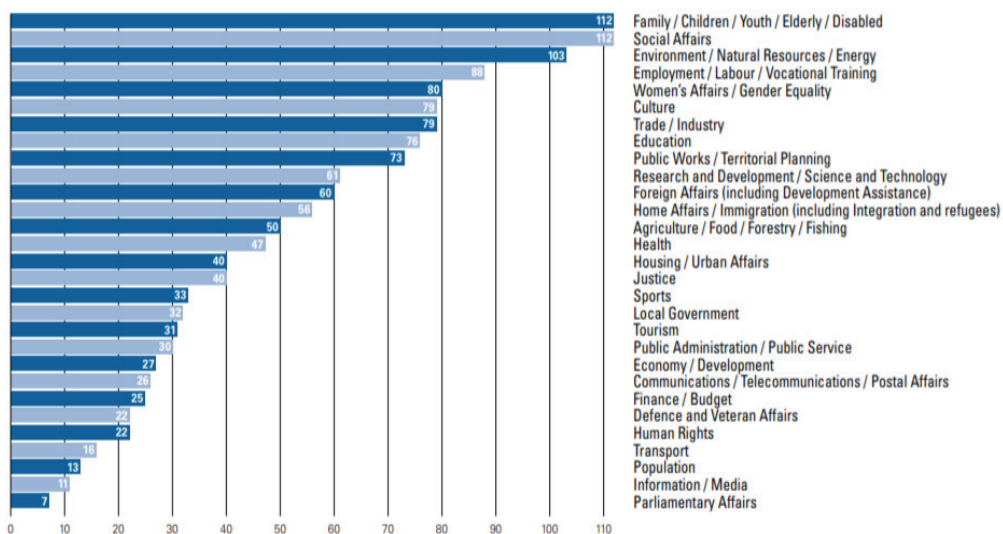
Figure 2. The portfolio held by women ministers (1451 portfolios in 190 countries)

Source: Women in ministerial positions, UN Women, 2020

Modern states increasingly recognize the political empowerment of women as a necessary criterion. For the international community, the attention to gender is highly significant as well. Sundström et al. (2017) acknowledge that the declarations of a wide range of international bodies, primarily led by the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the African Union, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the Organization of American States, urge member states to attain a minimum of 30% of women in all the elected positions. At the moment, the systematic marginalization of women as a group for the access and achievement of equal levels of political influence is universal. This has adverse effects on their involvement in formal political channels. Therefore, a societal lens on the process of women's political empowerment must recognize the differences between women worldwide and within their societies that link the ability to empower some women to others (Tripp, 2015).

The study by the UN Women on the input to (OHCHR, 2018) draft guidelines on effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs signifies that there is a proof that women's leadership in decision-making systems strengthens them, especially women at the political leadership level that they engage and promote social equity concerns, such as reducing gender-based abuse, parental leave, childcare, pensions, gender inclusion legislation, and electoral reform at the parliament. As more women are represented, the general legislative views could be more favorable. Locally, women's participation in decision-making bodies was seen to be effective. For example, in India, the Panchayat (local councils) showed that drinking water schemes in women-led boards were 62% higher than those with men-led commissions (UN Women, 2018). A direct relationship between women in municipal councils and childcare availability is well identified in Norway. Women's involvement and inclusion in public policy in conflict-affected settings are necessary to unify fragmented societies and increase peace-building policies. Apart from that, women's political leadership increases educational and career expectations for girls and young women, which is an essential part of women and youth's overall empowerment. Therefore, as it could be seen, women's political empowerment is crucial, and the study on this specific theme is more significant.

According to the World Economic Forum research on the Global Gender Gap (World Economic Forum, 2017), the global gender gap is alarming, particularly women's political and financial involvement and independence. Among these, the lowest empowerment is women's political participation and involvement in politics and the political structure, only 23%, whereas financial assistance and financial independence exceeded 58%. This statistic demonstrates the need for regulation and active involvement in politics and economic empowerment to decrease the gender gap from 68%. Regarding the South Asian nations' gender gap status, Liberia has the most significant rating for the reduced gender gap. Mauritius has the lowest rating, even though there is not much distinction between the general and two-point recognition. What concerns political empowerment, South Asia's most substantial rating is ascribed to India with 15, while Nepal's most minor rating was assigned to 80. However, concerning hygiene, the largest class is attributed to Guatemala and Mauritius. Gender quota is a way for women to battle the unspoken obstacles that keep them from participating in politics. As gender quotas can relate to many core concepts in feminist theory and political theory, such as justice, equality, equity, gender quotas are an essential research subject (Dahlerup, 1988; Krook, 2014). Political empowerment is a way to enhance flexibility, break down confines, enhance self-esteem and women's self-image, and build their lives by participating in decision-making. It will contribute to the rising knowledge framework and critical evaluation to track and influence the progress in development. Due to women's involvement in politics, numerous social policies and systems have been launched for children. They have the voice to request public assistance for further advancement and participation by empowering all types of females (Siim, 2013; Siim, Mokre, 2013). The enhanced female involvement compelled governance and strategy formulations for gender equality and the feminist agenda to have a more significant regulatory industry (Eto, 2010).

As Kabeer (2005) views, the notion of empowerment is studied through three tightly interrelated aspects: organization, assets, and achievement. The agency reflects the method by which decisions are created and implemented. Therefore, it is essential for the notion of empowerment. The resources are a tool through which the organization performs its impact, and the accomplishment relates to its results. Stromquist (1993) firmly identifies that women's political empowerment is essential because it can enhance the ability to analyze the neighboring atmosphere in political and cultural aspects. It enables females to be more conscious of their collective action and decision-making.

According to Mendez and Mueller (1991), there are distinct reasons for these changes. Sometimes, it is because of women's role in campaigning by encouraging others to vote, contributing to rallies and party gatherings. Creating a separate voting facility for women to support their women candidates increased the voter turnout. The increase in reservation seats for women has encouraged more women to be candidates in the election, even though the country is strict in its religious practices and forces women to follow that culture. Women's political activism was limited in the voting sphere and concentrated in decision-making. The country's reservation system with 33% gives women many opportunities to be the power structure. This scheme can adapt to the other countries that still lack political empowerment of women. Political empowerment is as well closely related to the women's access to material prospects. The OECD Gender, Institutions, and Development Database on females possessing property (OECD, 2014), European nations, mainly the Baltic and Northern Europe, show significant improvements.

In contrast, Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries offer negative patterns. The most influential female possession of the property goes to Latvia with 47 proportions, Lithuania with 46, Estonia with 39, and Italy with 32. Jordan recorded the lowest female possession of property with 03%, Guinea with 06%, Guatemala with 08%, and Indonesia with 09%. The political participation and the proportion of female ministers are as well different around the globe. OECD statistics (OECD, 2019) show that the most significant percentage of female ministers belongs to Spain (64.7%), accompanied by Sweden (54.5%), Columbia (52.9%), and Costa Rica (51.9%), while Japan (5.3%), Hungary (7.7%), and Turkey (12.5%) show lesser participation of women as ministers.

1.1.1. Features of political empowerment

Saradamoni (1994) views that money, power, and muscle strength might have distanced ordinary women from politics, especially if they do not have a male who supports and creates opportunities for women to enter politics. Women have not established an independent viewpoint or started to raise concerns about themselves and society, including politics, for all the reasons that have been listed before. Thus, the government has supported the surveyed population into socio-economic classes and should have given more useful knowledge about the place they lived in. Many consumer goods soon establish a dichotomy of indulging in looking for favors or bribes and disliking and distrusting the corrupt, including politicians and bureaucrats. Opportunism, deception, and hypocrisy are now more visible and

familiar than ever. There was a time when there was a sense of pride, gender disparity in Kerala's public domain, and its contemporary nature. Besides, some thoughts on the current connection between feminist political and intellectual work should be presented. Devika and Sukumar (2006) found several elements of transition in the socio-cultural climate in the positively charged political situation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Kerala: the development of political-administrative system of modern government with its impact on the social organization and the distribution of power and authority. In brief, the professionalized women's activism aims to use the corporate spectrum of public policy and political management, including legal lobbying and public awareness movements. Iceland as well worked together in the regional women's committees (Dahlerup, Gulli, 1985). These alliances create female leaders' government networks in the state and federal bureaucracies, female academics, and female political parties and politicians (Ledwith, 2003).

Women's organization's policies as well respect gender pay parity through internal and external pressures. The internal alliance dynamics drive union leaders to position unique women's issues on the mainstream union agendas which would help them to retain their jobs and skills. Akchurin and Lee (2013b) identify that in broader alliance sectors, including political parties and municipal and state bodies, international coalition dynamics mobilize the pro-women labor market and social policy agendas. Kenworthy and Malami (1999) say that religion is significant for the political gender inequalities. They apply this argument to other studies demonstrating that gender attitudes are affected by faith (Tomalin, 2011) and explain similar impacts on the social group's gendered political results (Kunovich, Paxton, 2005).

The research of Akchurin and Lee (2013b) demonstrates that social action is more efficient when activist groups have decentralized leadership and access to inter-organizational networks. Because it will allow them to adjust policies and methods to their goals and organize capital to tackle strategic challenges. The research by Devika and Thampi (2011) states that when it comes to political decision-making and funding allocation for various projects at the panchayat level, the male leaders and politicians tend to sideline women leaders. In comparison, in the upper echelons of political parties, the interviews with senior women politicians showed significant strains on this count: they face even tighter regulation of contact and movement by their affiliated party. Some significant instances seemed to show that support from senior leaders at higher levels, which is essential for women leaders to participate effectively in social development goals. Otherwise, they must follow the male-dominated local party committee's rules and the party's state leadership.

ECOSOC (2010) as well noticed that only when women leaders exercised smooth control, learned laws, and became prominent within their political party, the significant synergies grew between their accomplishments, making them seem indispensable to the local growth. Ban and Rao (2008) identified that many classic modernizations and regular dynamics studies have taken Indian research. Such a review has improved common knowledge of many aspects of demographics and

growth. However, many of these works have a persistent trend towards excessively narrow thinking, especially the presumption that economic factors dictate demographic change. Although financial considerations are significant, an alternate viewpoint is given, which states that more attention should be paid to the political trends, and becoming global. This segment outlines post-1980 demographic developments in India and then turns into demographic policies and related controversies. Hautzinger (2007) found that institutionalized feminism, rather than taking women to their political and social ambitions, may provide a way for the state to control and demobilize feminist advocacy.

Mohanty (1984) and Mohanty (1995) see the theoretical concept of society's disposal of feminist politics to mobilize the political but not biological, economic, geographical, or national base for coalitions. If the commonalities among police officers, pregnant women, and feminist activists in post-authoritarian Brazil were not nuanced and incomplete, it would be inappropriate to imagine female citizenry culture as its context is distinct. Likewise, Allen (2016) and Yuval-Davis (1994) point out the complexities of objectively distinguishing essentialism from the experienced authority that women or any social community share collectively. Indeed, such a type of small-written essentialism has allowed women to create imagined communities of women that can transcend gender, race, and nationality boundaries and reforms.

In political decision-making, a leader must find a problem or key issues and how to solve that problem and then determine what kind of help or situations are in place to solve the problem and decide what types of resources are available for the problem-solving. After a centralized discussion with law enforcement officials and administrators with various departments, it has been determined what is the most appropriate. Understanding the law that is implemented is especially important after making the most appropriate decision. It is essential to identify whether any changes or changes are necessary to complete the decision-making process. As the leaders of panchayat, they should have a clear understanding of various developmental activities that are taking place in their community, for example, in the face of different social conditions, especially natural disasters, floods, droughts, and epidemics, setting up such activities on time, without any hassle.

As Easton (1957) says, studying politics is about learning how to make and implement sound decisions for society. In that sense, authority is defined as the basis of political power. In the developed nations, women's empowerment is measured by observing their welfare policies that enable females to get adequate household support and childcare facilities and individual growth without losing their job opportunities, which decreases the gender gap and discrimination in the workplace. Concerning gender equality and more substantial wage for both males and females, the public sector always benefits private sector. One of the primary variables that is attributable to this is the persuasive negotiation and organization and union of employees in the advanced and developing world, where it is hard to have the bondage and institutional processes in the private sector. However, the regions still lag in the inequality and gender advancement for economic development, independence, and political participation and empowerment. The consequence of the

dominant masculine mentality and society's patriarchal structure prohibits most females from being financially autonomous and politically motivated. Clots-Figueras (2012) finds that people in India and the United States are different, especially when understanding women's importance in politics. She finds that the developed countries can have distinctly different environments, meaning politicians may have other interests or be responsive for various issues.

In Kerala's case, in the 1930s, when communal politics in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar acquired exceptional importance and presence (Rangaswamy, 1981, as cited in Devika, 2010), women who searched for positions in developing political institutions faced even more significant difficulties. Anna Chandy, who challenged the Travancore elections in 1931, had to face challenges. Women who joined the public followed the mainstream political-nationalist or communist and class in different ways came to be regarded as secondary to national interests or questions of race, class, and culture (Abraham, 2019; Devika, 2008; Singh, 2017). The first-generation feminists in Kerala failed to respond to the creatively changing political circumstances. Their political populism, coupled with the extreme elitism that stopped them from seeing working-class women as something other than raw material that needed to transform into ideals, undoubtedly contributed enormously to their marginalization. Sooryarmoorthy (2000) identifies that women's political interest and motivation will enhance social development. Women's participation in politics is critical in emerging globalization, internal systemic transition problems, evolving nature of nationalism, and the rise of religious fundamentalism. Sakhi argues that each topic must be examined from a multi-cultural, gender perspective. Women living in profoundly gendered structures are the most affected by the rapidly shifting global forces (OECD, 2017b). A system of social structures and behaviors in which men rule and control women is described as patriarchal structure, and gender as a socially constructed inequality relationship in many societies. Such discriminative practices are deeply rooted, resistant to change, long-lasting, and hard to reform or eliminate, because gender differences affect many institutions. In political feminism, the distinction between political and civil society could become blurred, and it was uncertain whether women's policy organizations were solely accountable to governments or women's movements. The political system remained overwhelmingly male-dominated, lacking vital components of good governance: state power, sensitivity to citizen needs, and transparency. In certain instances, states were weak, dysfunctional, and failing.

Thanikodi and Sugirtha (2007) identify that women's complete political subordination covers various societies, economic systems, and regimes. In most communities, a dynamic political power hierarchy consists of several social orders, in which gender is just one part. Nonetheless, the members of any party may be more involved in politics than their group's women. The lack of self-confidence is one of the fundamental causes of women under hierarchical democratic institutions, including parliaments, governments, and political parties. Women will achieve the highest political point with trust and dedication. Therefore, women should believe in themselves and end the common belief that men must become their leaders. In some countries, women see politics as a dirty game. This barred trust in women's ability to

challenge political processes. Khosla and Barth (2008) as well identify that such understanding is prevalent worldwide; most governmental bodies govern people following their interests. Male-dominated government bodies are not addressing women or women's problems. The following are some of the measures to improve women's capacity to engage in the decision-making proposed by the United Nations Organizations such as steps to be taken by States, state bodies, private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, sub-regional and regional agencies, NGOs, and international educational organizations.

Women have been excluded from this most visible and apparent decision-making field; thus, their future political involvement still comes as an afterthought in considering women's position. An evident reason is that the society has allocated specific roles to women in production and home. The politics is exercised by the hierarchical organizational leadership, which remains a male sector, giving women-only decorative functions. In Newell's (2017) views, it is much more difficult for women to dedicate their time to the demands of full-time election campaigning in Nigeria and many other countries. Females must look after children and satisfy their spouse's needs, and often spouses are either opposed or uncooperative with their wife's political actions. Those women who appeared as political celebrities frequently did not stay with their husbands or had their husbands actively promoting them.

Furthermore, Iwanaga (2008) mentions that several new women first enter politics as their male counterparts. In most cases, it could be seen that the political parties usually favor confining their women leaders to their party's women's wings within the party organization. However, political parties have appointed women as state executives for smaller national posts, such as deputy governor candidates (Araújo, 2003). More women are seen involved in the state executive divisions. It becomes particularly true where a woman is willing to bring the mechanism into motion to get things started, either in government or in a party, as they are compassionate to the public.

The concept of empowerment includes various power features and involves decision-making, participatory politics, enhancing individual potential, social construction through actions (Luttrell et al., 2009; Mosedale, 2005b). The World Bank emphasizes (Alsop et al., 2005) that the empowerment must have mainly three dimensions of development, such as:

1. Personal, includes self-confidence of individuals for active participation.
2. Rational, having the ability to negotiate and a role in decision-making.
3. Collective action, the involvement of individuals in political life through the collaboration instead of competition.

Every democratically chosen country must include women's empowerment as a unique job to be accomplished. There were as well very few trials on women's status in parliament, state, and official governance (Bolzendahl, 2014). Women's political actions in numerous protests, boycotts, operations through non-governmental organizations, and fighting for constitutional freedoms are evident as

well. Outside the restriction of voting rights, women's organizations can continuously pursue assistance from the NGO[1].

Some writers (Coffe, Bolzendahl, 2011; Desposato, Norrander, 2009) found that women's protests are more significant in achieving other forms of freedoms in a political party to promote females to be more involved politically. Due to the absence of adequate support for females in politics, they are excluded continuously at higher power politics (Hughes, Tripp, 2015). Thus, it is essential to encourage women's political empowerment programs. Figure 3 shows various political participation levels, and this research illustrates how women can participate in politics.

In the first place, women feel their presence by giving their votes to a responsible leader in the country's electoral process and leading and participating in various political discussions. There are situations where women who are politically interested in social activities are recognized by multiple political parties at the right time and thus realize their potential. Numerous parties are trying to make women interested in the political field to make their daughters candidates for the next election. Once such a situation is available, the immediate next step is to obtain the party's approval for the political party's leadership and obtain the political party leader's consent and acceptance. Sometimes, it is the responsibility of the office-bearers and members of the party to contribute to their various service activities. If they are the members of less affluent families, they can help financially by conducting social services.

In order to convince society that they can excel in being good leaders, any political action is necessary. Therefore, every upcoming public figure is responsible for participating in meetings between the opposition and the government. They can be aware of the shortcomings in governance in a society or a state and have freedom of expression against politicians and policy frameworks. Moreover, it can be noted that any form of women's political participation, such as strikes or protests, or any form of political association can only be made with the family and society's approval. Therefore, it is imperative to participate in various demonstrations and community protest rallies and use their precious time to organize or run for the office. If they stay as members of a political party for about two to three years and provide various developmental activities to the community, they will become candidates in the election. Thus, a person recognized and admired by the party can easily win the election and become the panchayat authority. In Arnstein's (1969) views, political participation can be understood as "a categorical term for citizen power". As citizens of any society, women must participate in public governance and increase their leadership roles.

New forms of political participation increasingly question the status quo beyond the traditional government/state/political sphere. Parvin (2018) points to form political involvement outside the government level, but in response to the politically agreed issues, on which successful legislative/diplomatic agendas could

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[1]Organizations, which are independent from the government involvement, are known as non-governmental organizations or NGOs.

be formed. Verba and Nie (1972) identify it as activities of private citizens directly influencing government staff selection and actions. These examples demonstrate that the abstraction level helps to quickly cover new participation types at the expense of sacrificing methodological rigor and empirical precision.

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┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│              │     │              │     │ Trying to talk│    │              │
│    Voting    │ ──> │   Political  │ ──> │ someone into │ ──> │  Wearing a   │
│              │     │  discussion  │     │ voting a certain│  │    button    │
│              │     │              │     │     way      │     │              │
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┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│ Contacting an│     │   Donating   │     │ Attending in a│    │ Contributing │
│   official   │ ──> │  money to a  │ ──> │ political rally│ ──>│  time in a   │
│              │     │    party     │     │              │     │   campaign   │
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┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│ Active party │     │ Candidate for│     │              │
│  membership  │ ──> │   the office │ ──> │Holding office│
│              │     │              │     │              │
└──────────────┘     └──────────────┘     └──────────────┘
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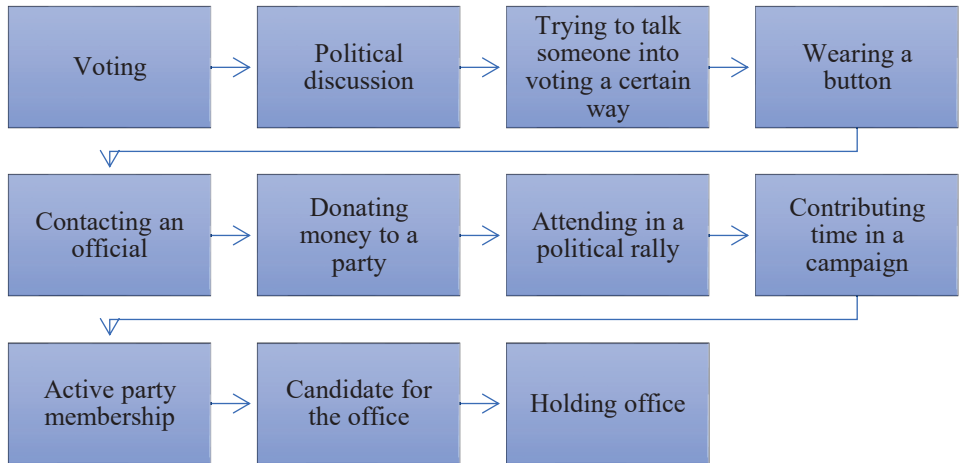
Figure 3. Levels of political participation

Source: adapted from Milbrath

As a conclusion of this chapter, it could be stated that women's political empowerment is essential in any society to attain women's social, economic, and political empowerment. In order to improve the status of a woman, gender equality measures are formulated with inclusive and equitable strategies. It can accomplish the necessary agreement in strategy formulation, implementation, and implementation by achieving the community's deprived and vulnerable sections and comprehending their needs and conditions. Another essential element is women's under-representation in the political and decision-making system. There are a gender categorization and stigma at the societal level, where females were always depicted as weaker; whereas, males were depicted as courageous and valuable. Even the governing section's masculinity tries to dominate women in the administrative system, especially during various political debates that take place at the parliament. In such scenarios, women leaders could not get sufficient attention or express their ideas and oppositions. Therefore, every nation must have stronger policies for increasing gender equality, motivating, and engaging more women in the political sphere to achieve political empowerment.

1.1.2. Women's political empowerment in a global context

The UN Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995) states that individuals need to engage entirely in the decision-making process that forms their life. The empowerment in the political domain is often linked to the democratization and political participation and enhancing grassroots and civil society organizations and marginalized social groups in domestic and local politics (Marchetti, 2010). In order to empower females in the political sphere, some instruction in governance,

regarding the promotion and other aspects, need to be provided. Poverty and associated problems can eradicate women's adequate political, financial, and cultural empowerment. If women become politicians, they will create various family planning policies, health care, education, social care, and overall quality of life due to their compassionate aspect towards people. Therefore, females need to regulate their political lives and get involved in the policies that formulate those scenarios. Even if economic empowerment happens as well, females tend to have less chance for political upliftment; it demonstrates the absence of effective national government empowerment strategies in those areas (World Bank, 2012).

However, there are numerous types of obstacles to female participation in the political sphere, such as ethnic distinctions, unemployment, and brutality against females' academic achievements, religious concerns, and the absence of efficient government measures (Gurirab, 2012; Terzi-Barbarosie, 2013; UN Women, 2014). One of the essential obstacles to women's empowerment at the political stage is seen in culture. Britton (2008) and Norris and Inglehart (2001) analyze the characteristics of social barriers to women's political involvement in their job on cultural barriers to fair representation. It demonstrates that although many post-industrial nations have evolved in the aspects of women and men culture and work-life, especially in the western world, it remains debatable concerning women's political involvement. However, in developing countries, women continue to face challenges of improving themselves in the political sphere due to lack of adequate childcare, literacy, healthcare, and increasing poverty, which still confines them to the household. Thus, the imbalance in social and economic life inhibits women's political development in the developing world.

Another significant aspect is regarding the election of women to the elected bodies. Due to the patriarchal mindset and the traditional socio-cultural and religious values, women were confined to the household in most regions, especially the developing world. It can be seen that even some female politicians face a harsh stance on women's political participation (IPU, 2020); however, when it goes to the Nordic region, the government's decades-long attempt to foster gender equality, the standard of life, women's rights, and growth enabled childcare policies to effectively engage women in their governance, election campaign and be a component of political decision-making (Karvonen, 1995). Thus, it is evident that the State's function is essential for any country to actively involve females and their political empowerment through different national, regional, and local stages.

In some Asian countries, e.g., India, China, Pakistani, women still have limited access to political life due to their cultural barriers and religious beliefs, including Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, and Hinduism (Douglas, Jalal, 2002; Geha, 2019; Ritchie et al., 2014). In Western Europe, the proliferation of equality and feminism encouraged females to be active citizens and vital in the decision-making system. Society's egalitarian approach towards females could promote women's empowerment programs in any government's political life. Thus, it recognized that women's political empowerment should instrument the culture's general growth. The United Nations (UNSTAT, 2015) study shows that women outnumber men with around 62 million worldwide. The level of child marriage is

seen as a fundamental breach of human rights that reduces teenager's educational and growth possibilities and exposes them to the danger of domestic violence and social isolation. There is a gradual decline in child marriage over the years; however, half of the women aged 20–24 marry in Southern Asian countries and two-fifths in sub-Saharan African countries.

The primary variable ascribed to the child marriage situation is the absence of education, which leaves females fewer chances to oppose poor choices and have their point of view. India has the highest number of child brides with 24 million globally, i.e., approximately 40% of 60 million child marriages. One of the significant side effects of child marriage in the early transformation of women into adulthood and motherhood before the mental, physical, biological, and emotional change is determining individual well-being and growth. It inhibits their overall well-being by adversely affecting education, employment, and self-reliance. The primary source for all the main problems influencing females is the deep-rooted patriarchal structure of society, which enables the male to dominate in the household and community by owning and allocating all the land and assets and even the idea of a dowry. It gives females fewer choices and leaves them dependent and accountable to males.

The notion of estate inheritance is highly patriarchal, and females have no choice and no freedom of ownership in the patriarchal structure. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2016) finding, the growing difference in the child sex ratio can contribute to the deficit of 23 million women in the age category of 20–49 by 2040. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB), due to the diminishing sex ratio, female offenses occur every 1.7 minutes in India, every 16 minutes, a rape occurs, and every 4.4 minutes, an incidence of domestic violence appears. The study on women's and men's equality in the EU (EUROPA, 2018) demonstrates the growing gender imbalance, particularly in South Asian nations and the newly emerging European counties of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, China, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the freshly formed European nations, such as Armenia and Azerbaijan, are at the bottom of the roster with 120 and 118, whereas Georgia comes fourth with 114. It demonstrates that the masculine domination and patriarchal mentality dominate in Asia and the freshly emerging countries of Eastern Europe. Therefore, in East Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the developed world, equal participation and movement of people could be seen, mainly attributed to the attitude, freedom of movement, and less male-dominant society and family.

According to Alexander et al. (2016), women's political empowerment is associated with improving women's resources, capacities, and accomplishments to obtain men's equality in affecting and practicing political power. Kittilson (2008) provides one of the main arguments for gender quotas: excluding them when women are in power positions will become more difficult. Dahlerup and Gulli (1985) state that the quota systems cannot remove all forms of barriers for women's political empowerment. The researchers (Devika, Sukumar, 2006; Kabeer, 1989; Usha, 2005) have pointed out that structural differences exist between men and women,

especially in aspects that are reduced to the level of organizational power and the effect of decisions on the policy. They as well see that the concepts of authority and sexuality are central to understanding women's advancement in politics. The power shows how the hierarchical social structure that benefits men are perpetuated through women's inequality and sexism, and gender focus is seen in society as a disadvantageous portion. Therefore, a platform needs to be established for society's voiceless segment to promote the decentralization of authority and power. Therefore, the representation of disadvantaged groups in decision-making needs to be increased.

Most importantly, it must be accessible to the elite and marginalized sections, such as women. Sustainable development relies on the equal access of people to various resources. It covers significant opportunities in all sectors, including political participation. If men dominate management, there is a strong probability of gender biases in resource distribution and regulation. It will lead women to economic poverty and social marginalization. Therefore, females' increasing involvement in the political process would be a precondition for their financial and cultural emancipation of the society's women section. The Beijing Declaration (Beijing Conference) emphasized that women's empowerment and full involvement in all areas of culture, including participation in decision-making processes and authority, are essential to achieving inclusion, growth, and harmony (Usha, 2005).

There are numerous female rulers in the political sphere worldwide, such as Vigdis Vinnbogadottir, who became the first democratically chosen female chair in Iceland in 1980. Margaret Thatcher was well known as the Iron Lady, who served Great Britain as its first female prime minister. In Sri Lanka, during 1960, Ms. Sirimavo Bandaraniake was elected as the first female prime minister, and later, her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga became the first female President of Sri Lanka. Golda Meir became the first woman prime minister of Israel, and Benazir Bhutto became Pakistan's first woman prime minister. In Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia became the first female prime minister. In Myanmar, Aung San Su Kyi became a strong female ruler, whereas Hilary Clinton and Angela Merkel occupied respective positions in the USA and Germany. In India, Smt. Pratibha Patel became India's first female President, and Indira Gandhi was the first female prime minister. In Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė represented the nation as the first female President from 2010 to 2019. The below given figure shows the percentage of elected women in the national parliaments globally.
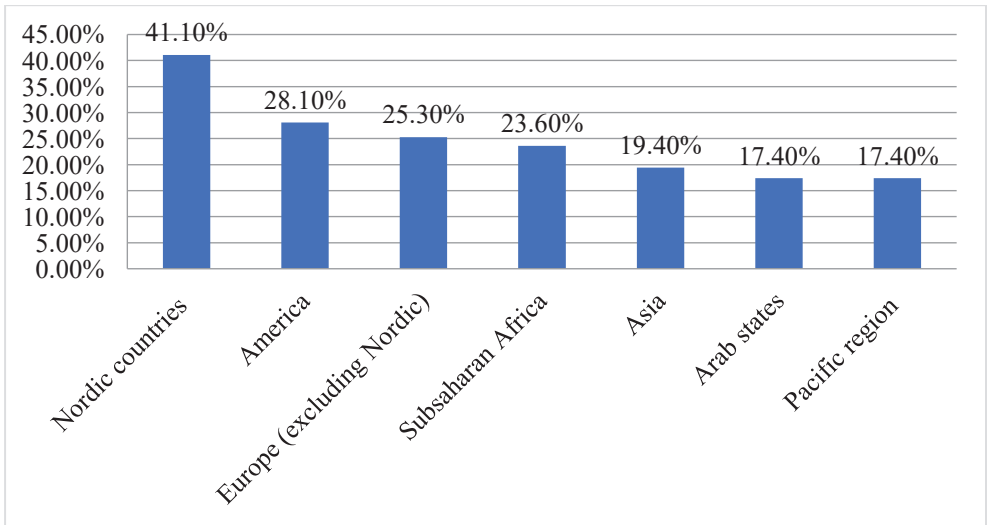
Figure 4. Women representation in parliament, global level

Source: Women in national parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017

Figure 4 shows the women's representation in parliament at the global level, according to the Woman in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017. It shows that the greatest representation was shown in Western countries, especially with higher democratic orientation and human rights for women's representation. One of the significant countries with the highest participation of women is the Nordic regions or the Scandinavian countries with 41.10 percent of women representation in parliament, which were followed by the America of the Northern American region with a representation of 28.10, which was followed by Europe, excluding Nordic countries, with a representation of 25.30%, and the Sub-Saharan African countries with 23.60%. The lowest representation of women in parliament at the global level can be attributed to the Asian and Middle Eastern regions. The Asian region had a presentation of 19.40%.

In contrast, the Arab states represent 17.40% with a similar rating of 17.40% of the Pacific regions. This shows that when it comes to women's representation in parliament at the global level, numerous factors can be attributed to their representation. The geographical location and its significance matter as well. The countries with the highest women representation are Western democratic countries with higher transparency and a predominant approach for woman empowerment. In contrast, the regions with the least representation are those countries that have a significant gender disparity, which can be attributed to the numerous factors, such as patriarchal mindsets, religious considerations, and other social-cultural traits, which act as an inhibiting factor for woman's overall empowerment and development, which finally can lead to women's representation in parliament and other national bodies.

Kerala women's political empowerment

There were different committees for the administration of Kerala, which have existed since the beginning of time. For the administrative purposes, a large area was subdivided into several smaller components. It has been documented that there were several types of administrations in existence. There were institutions that were in charge of enacting legislation and ensuring the maintenance of law and order. From Kerala's history, it can be seen that there were numerous institutions based on the caste system at different periods of time. Kerala became a state on November 1, 1956, when the Constitution of India was amended. The Kerala Panchayat was established on the 23rd of April 1994, in accordance with the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, which was passed in 1993 (Department of Panchayats, Government of Kerala).

According to the 2004 census, Kerala had 991 Grama Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats, and 14 District Panchayats by 2004 (Local Self Government Department, Kerala). In each district, there are a number of different Gram Panchayats. Each Grama Panchayath is responsible for a specific set of tasks. It can be seen that the Gram Panchayat's responsibilities are within the Gram Panchayat. A panchayat evaluates waterways and canals to maintain the market, keeping roads and public properties and immune measures in place and immune-boosting measures, the registration and entry of births and deaths, which have to be entered into the registry, and make use of facilities, such as urinals and toilets in public places, among other things. In addition, a panchayat takes measures to prevent dowry violence and alcoholism and promote awareness of social illnesses, which are affecting women and children and encouraging people to participate in all activities. Moreover, the disaster relief activities should be coordinated to improve the community's unity. These responsibilities include concentrating on the poorest neighboring groups and organizing self-help groups.

In the same way, the different wards of a panchayat have varying levels of responsibilities. There are various levels of responsibilities in a Gram Panchayat as well. The most common type of irrigation in the panchayat is agriculture irrigation; fisheries in the panchayat are family-owned businesses. Agriculture and housing are two of the most important aspects of the economy. The provision of education improves the quality of primary education and non-formal education. Another aspect regards the health and sanitation. A panchayat assures the general public's health and sanitation to conduct social welfare activities. Another significant aspect is efforts to reduce poverty, development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, panchayat coordination and other initiatives, which are being pursued. There are two main types of committees in the Gram Panchayat. The Standing Committee and the Steering Committee are the two most important committees in the organization. Standing Committees have been established to ensure that the Gram Panchayat's responsibilities are effectively conducted. Three permanent committees are established within each Gram Panchayat. It promotes the welfare development and financial resources. For example, the Gram Panchayat is an especially important and responsible government body. This is due to the fact that even if there is not a single standing committee, all of the panchayat's elected members should be included in

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one committee. Each of these three standing committees is responsible for training its officers in the art of considering all issues that come before the Panchayat Administrative Committee in a responsible manner. The Vice President of the Gram Panchayat will chair the Finance Standing Committee, which will report to the Gram Panchayat President.

According to the information provided by the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act 1994 and Rules, each panchayat will be governed by a steering committee, which will be comprised of the President, Vice President, and Chairperson of the Standing Committee, among other members. The President of the Grama Panchayat will serve as the Chairperson of the Steering Committee. The activities of the standing committee are coordinated and evaluated by the steering committee, which has the primary responsibility for this. Panchayats as well have the responsibility of implementing various community-based programs by allocating various government-sponsored programs, programs received by Panchayats, and various amounts received by the Central Government, such as grants to deserving individuals in a timely and responsible manner. In each ward, the Gram Sabha is a public gathering of aspirants from all of the Gram Panchayats and all of the wards. In fact, a single local body should have as many wards as there are wards in the local government body, in which it is located. The Gram Sabha is significant in the Panchayat Raj system, because it serves as a forum for discussing the problems that people in a particular area are experiencing in their daily lives as well as other personal and social issues. The Gram Sabhas, an important institution for direct democracy in the panchayat raj system, serve as a platform for individuals living in the area to connect with the state. Gram Sabha meetings provide an opportunity for the people of the area to communicate with their elected representatives about the problems they are experiencing, implement the facilities they require, and clearly identify the areas in which the panchayat should concentrate its efforts. According to the law, the Gram Sabha is required to convene at least once a year. The Gram Sabha meeting must be announced to the public at least once a week before it takes place. It is reasonable to assume that if the panchayat convenes a Gram Sabha but does not receive the required participation of the people's representatives and the people, then, it is reasonable to assume that the Gram Sabha should be reconvened and convened another day. The Gram Sabha is a special meeting, in which the participation of the general public is absolutely essential. The Gram Sabha is a public forum for debating various responsibilities, such as identifying suitable beneficiaries for various development activities, promoting unity in the community, fostering harmony among the people, and organizing arts and sport fairs among other things. In addition, the vigilance committee is an important part of a panchayat's governance structure. According to the Kerala Women's Commission, the Jagratha Samithi is a panchayat-level body that has been established to monitor and evaluate the attacks and discrimination against women, to take strict action against those who perpetrate such acts, to protect the rights of women, to improve the status of women, and to elevate the status of women in a society. In most panchayats, the large-scale vigilance committee is a mechanism that needs to be addressed more effectively in order to be effective.

In a country such as India, the concept of democratic decentralization is extremely important. It is because India is a land of many languages, many cultures, and a great deal of variety and diversity; thus, the democratic decentralization has a number of options for the implementation in India. Decentralization is extremely important in a democratic functioning in India, and it can be achieved in a variety of ways. People and their representatives have a unique opportunity to bridge the gap that exists between those who govern and the people who are governed as well as to ensure their active participation in various activities led by the state in order to strengthen their interdependence (Dutta, 2009). The fundamental elements of the Panchayat include democracy, decentralization, power transfer, and the welfare of the public. As a result, the Panchayat Raj can be understood as a form of democratic decentralization or decentralization in general. According to the concept of Panchayati Raj, local bodies at all levels, including the district and sub-district levels, have the right to self-government, while the government's powers and responsibilities are kept in mind. The Panchayati Raj system's primary goal is to devolve power to the people and their closest representatives. The Panchayati Raj is not only a process of power transfer to the lower echelons; it is as well a means of ensuring self-governance along with power and creating conditions for the independent exercise of power in institutions among other things. The practice of dividing a country into smaller provinces and states and delegating control to them has a long history in many parts of the world, including India for the purposes of governance and the development of the first sub-nationalist movements. Local government systems are documented to have existed in a variety of forms and manifestations throughout the history. Despite the fact that the caste and religious authority were restricted to the elites, these were served as centers of independence and efficiency to a certain extent.

Kerala was the first state in the world to elect a Communist-led government (Lieten, 2002). Despite this, 64 years after the state's formation, Kerala's political parties have failed to produce a single female Chief Minister in their history. In this case, the two fronts that alternately ruled Kerala came together as a single entity. Kerala has never had a female chief executive, but it did have a female minister in its first cabinet, which was the first in the country. KR Gowri Amma was the most powerful minister in the history of Kerala politics, holding the position for more than a decade. Over the course of the state's 64-year history, eight women have held ministerial positions (Alagarsamy, 2021). During the first 14 assemblies in Kerala, 22 ministries were established, but only nine of these ministries were headed by women. Kerala is a patriarchal state, as evidenced by the fact that the number of female ministers has not increased by a factor of two in 64 years.

Minister Achuthanandan's government implemented a 50 percent reservation in local bodies in 2009. Women leaders in the Gram Panchayats and local bodies of the panchayat system are frequently visible in the districts, and they have the ability to work effectively in reversing the old masculine practices that are prevalent in Kerala society. There are some situations in Kerala society where female leaders are not standing for the ideological cause or to be passive in order to maintain their positions of power. Within the context of the revitalization effort, a variety of

interventions and discussions are taking place. Consequently, they should not be required to decide on who they want to elect in the next election. The people in Kerala should be reminded of the importance of being responsible leaders who serve their community. The Panchayati Raj is one of the most significant catalysts for the social change in Kerala today. As a result, women can participate in the cycle of panchayat administration alongside men due to the implementation of reservation, which will allow to raise more women to the positions of power and ensure a greater representation.

The panchayat raj system is credited with being the most important reason due to which women have been able to sit alongside male leaders when the panchayat administration comes to make decisions about the development of the panchayat and its surrounding areas. Everyone is aware of the fact that in many panchayats in Kerala, the development process can be conducted efficiently because the people in the leadership, such as the Development Standing Committee, are working equally. However, in some panchayats, if the president is a woman, they must make many decisions, because they do not have a clear understanding or the responsibility of the panchayat is not clearly defined. Many panchayats have a clear understanding that women can often be evaluated by the general public for a variety of reasons, ranging from small to large, such as their family members refusing to allow women leaders to collaborate with men at all hours during the day or night in emergencies. At the moment, the state of Kerala and India do not have any comprehensive studies, particularly in the field of politics. In this study, the author of the dissertation intends to analyze and investigate what constitutes accountability, as it is frequently impossible to analyze and investigate the political significance of women who have passed through the panchayat system in their leadership as well as changes in their leadership; therefore, the author of the dissertation is optimistic about the outcome of this investigation.

1.1.3. Theoretical framework for political empowerment analysis

In this research, the author would like to use four theories: Participation and democratic theory by Carole Pateman (1970), Leadership theory by Northouse (2013), Liberal Feminism by John Stuart Mill, and Theory of Intersectional Feminism By Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as presented in Figure 5.
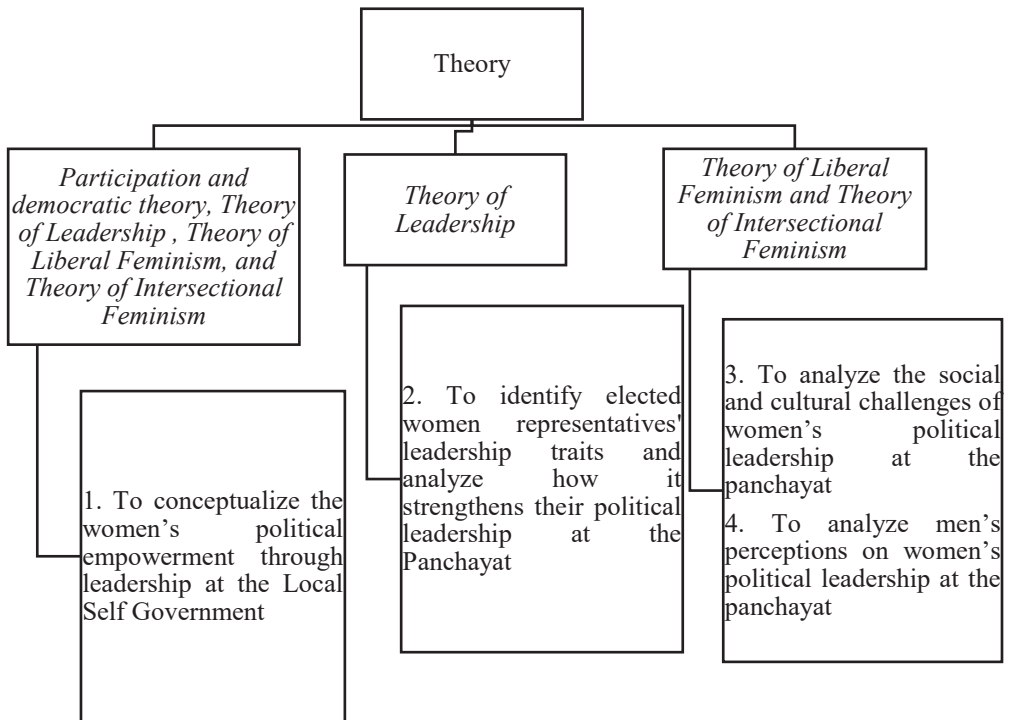
Figure 5. Explanatory theories of women's political empowerment

Source: created by the author

All the theories, such as participation and democratic theory, theory of leadership, theory of liberal feminism, and theory of intersectional feminism help to conceptualize women's political empowerment. The theory of leadership is used for identifying the leadership traits of the elected women leaders at the panchayats. The theory of liberal feminism and theory of intersectional feminism explains various social and cultural challenges that women leaders face and men's perspective on women's political empowerment through leadership. Further on, the details and specificities of all these theories will be explained.

1.1.3.1. Participation and democratic theory

This research tries to identify the PRI policy's importance at the Local Self-Government for women's political empowerment. This research uses Carole Pateman's (1970) participation and democratic theory for this reason. Pateman's

(1970) basic concept is that citizens and their organizations cannot differentiate between the participation and democratic theory. Democratic institutions operate at the national and local levels, and without the full participation of all people, they will be unable to conduct good governance. In different areas, socialization or institutional conditioning will establish social expectations and cognitive capabilities of democracy. All of this can be made possible by the people's active involvement in public policies. Representative governmental engagement is the analytical factor that involves developing leader's policy skills and techniques. This will actively contribute to the social development by stabilizing and sustaining the representative plan through the participatory framework. The participation develops and promotes the required qualities, particularly the interactions between people and governing bodies between individuals.

A democratic theory defines participatory governance as a consideration-oriented ideology. Any goal of raising the quality of society was inconsistent with the increase in the representation of minorities by high-level participation. Therefore, the idea of a shared motive is central to the heart of the participatory democratic government. The Government of India introduced its Panchayati Raj Institutions Act in 1992 (The Constitution, Seventy-third Amendment Act, 1992) to eliminate specific differences between men and women. This Act provides for 50% of women's seat reservations in their local self-government. Karpowitz et al. (2012) view the power system, which carries forward a significant gender disparity. However, it disappears under the ordinary course, as it is postulated, and very few women have the chance to be the government representatives. Participatory growth can eradicate inequality through the social change of institutional procedures through active and equitable women's participation with men.

According to Chant and Gutmann (2002), the political authority's legal procedure must justify those bound by it and determine through free will deliberations. At the moment, institutional participation must follow strict requirements to fulfill its legitimizing function. Bryld (2001, 2010) regarded the lack and deepening of modernist development's focus on promoting macroeconomic growth as the only means of sustained change in the early 1990s, as the prominent policy theorist and practitioner faced. This conversation turned into greater development for women, highlighting the individual's role in their growth and suggesting greater responsibility. Increased power means altering the functioning of the current social governance structure and its civil society. The way citizens are governed, and the government's involvement in the internal organization and the environment have become the critical focus of change. India is the second-largest nation with the most population, second to China with an estimated one billion people. It is a diverse community with different religions and languages on all fronts. Diversity illustrates the task of decentralizing the growth of democracy. Despite India's global development after independence, the situation is still one of the world's poorest, financially and culturally, when it comes to various socio-economic standards.

Northhouse (2018) stated that reserving seats for women in a patriarchal society, such as India, is one mechanism for uplifting their social, economic, and

political standards. Moreover, the participative governance, the most active modern democratic debate on political decisions, is compatible with the objective reasoning. Urbinati and Warren (2008) pointed out that the democratic representation could provide an idealizing dimension of politics that resolves segregation and formal political involvement. The theory of participation and democracy focuses on the leadership growth and increases the effective governance. The leaders are the elected representatives of women at the panchayat in this report. Therefore, female leadership problems must be defined by using democracy theory and engagement for their effective leadership. The importance of participation and democratic theory or participatory democratic political systems is a matter that needs to be analyzed much more in the present day, as different political systems still face hurdles due to the gender insensitiveness and male-dominated political frameworks. The politics understands that the direction and functions of various political systems emphasize broad democratic participation in this context. A country is a part of politics; sustainable development is provided equally to all without hindrance. Therefore, the participation and democratic theory unite people from different sectors of society and facilitate their collective empowerment. People and leaders are important to various forms of regulatory governance in a country, sometimes criticizing them or making necessary amendments. In a situation, such as in India, where the population is large, more than half of the population is women, and the theory is that women should give priority to the democratic system. The panchayat raj system has created a situation for women in India to advance the political system. It is necessary to create a position where women can understand and evaluate matters with great care and caution in the democratic process. This law provides all society sections' right to know and lead governance without corruption, nepotism, or dissent. It could be seen that the participatory democratic politics must be central to the women's development and upliftment. In India, a democratic system could be seen where people make the right decisions on policy initiatives. Today, most of the democracies in India have a network of direct involvement of people.

The primary objective of this research is to identify the importance of the Panchayati Raj Institution policy at the Local Self Government offices for women's political empowerment. The leading theory used to determine the aim that is the participation and democratic theory, which states that people are interconnected with their governance actors. This is the fundamental statement of participation and democratic theory. The theory as well noticed that successful governance is only possible if citizens are fully integrated into a democratic society. Therefore, the necessary changes must be made in the democratic system to develop various qualities and create a fundamental partnership between organizations and their actors.

Another critical point that this theory suggests is that in a democracy, it is the country's responsibility to create numerous opportunities for its citizens to participate in its successful governance. Ensuring all forms of equality and rights for people in a democracy is essential to ensure sustainable development. Therefore, it is necessary to create opportunities for women to enter politics equally to men and advocate participation and democratic theory. Thus, India's existing Panchayati Raj

Institutions policy enables more women to develop their leadership in politics, be fully involved in the establishment and power of democracy, and work in governance to enhance participation and democracy.

Women, who were often confined to their family responsibilities and taking care of the family's day-to-day affairs, sought to establish their representation at the forefront of society after introducing the Panchayati Raj system. This policy creates more significant opportunities for women's democratic participation in India more actively. This policy has enabled more women to enter politics to use their abilities to improve society and empower their personal development in many ways. Therefore, the PRI policy ensures the elements of participatory democratic theory. Because of the government's involvement in improving leaders' capabilities and political understanding, the Panchayati Raj system can increase the number of women in the political arena and bring them to the forefront of the panchayat and improve their skills and ability governance.

Another critical aspect of the theory of participation and democracy is increasing the personal interaction between citizens and governing bodies and making the development process more transparent. Therefore, this reveals that the Panchayati Raj Institution undoubtedly explains women's importance in the local bodies and their motivation to assist the panchayat administration with utmost sincerity and transparency. After implementing the Panchayati Raj system, women who only used to look after the family responsibilities came to the point where they could perform their duties as strong leaders in their panchayat. Moreover, they are in constant contact with people and solve their problems. Therefore, women who grew up among the people moved to leaders who could serve people fully by using their political power. Thus, by using the theory of participation and democracy in this study, the author evaluated women's political significance in local government leadership positions through the Panchayati Raj Institutions' policy. Thus, various theories on leadership will be explained, and then, the focus will be on the leadership traits.

1.1.3.2. Theory of leadership

As Bennett and Edelman (1985) state, a political leader is an element in a logical positivism model. The leader is perceived as someone free to choose actions, who can evoke a strong emotional response in large populations by force of personality or manipulation of the symbolic culture. The leader defines the situation and can identify a problem and present a solution. Thus, the perceived impact of the leader is implied by the preceding associations. As a sign for the state, a political leader brings reason to the situation.

Contemporary literature on leadership in the political sciences has primarily sought to understand the policy innovation and goal achievement. Blondel (1987) views political leadership as an action to change the environment. Goal-centric leadership strategies aim to distinguish leadership from the office-holding, assessing leaders by calculating defined priorities against accomplishments. Through these measures, leadership is not a journey or a relationship as a change in the social and political landscape, for which leaders are the instigators and overseers. Leadership is

a process by a leader who guides others (Prentice, 2004) and motivates followers to exceed expectations. Some leadership theories identify leaders as empowering and encouraging others rather than direct leadership (Palmer et al., 2001).

Leaders need followers, and followers need leaders (Jago, 1982). Leaders and followers are inextricably linked; often, a leader who starts and creates ties, the communication linkage carries the burden of maintaining the relationship. Leaders have an ethical responsibility to meet the needs and concerns of their followers. In the views of Burns (2004), leadership over human beings is exercised when individuals with certain motives and simple poses mobilize their own institutional, political, psychological, and other resources in a way that stimulates, engages, and satisfies the reasons of followers in competition or conflict with others. It did match the typical desires and beliefs held by the leaders and followers alike. In short, the leaders with motive and power base the motive of followers to realize the aims of the leaders and followers equally. Leadership is exercised in a state of conflict or competition, in which other leaders compete in attracting potential follower's motive bases. Therefore, the leaders represent a specific form of a broader force. Leadership is similar to power, which is connected, purposeful, and collective. Leadership shares the core role of achieving the aim with leadership. However, at least in a short-range, the reach and leadership domain is more limited than power (Hickman, Sorenson, 2014). Leaders do not suppress followers' motives, even if they wish to, and only lead others.

In Harwiki's (2013) opinion, a leader with a task orientation may be most effective in too high or low situational control circumstances. In contrast, a leader with people's orientation would be most effective in moderate situational control circumstances. In other words, leaders will change their style due to their influence over the situation that they and the group are facing. Edelman (1985) identified many features linked to the leader. Each of these characteristics relates either to the leader's elite or extra-ordinary qualities: intelligence, knowledge, skills, certainty, responsibility, capacity to give directions, success, conspicuousness, potentially. Therefore, a leader is set apart from the general mass recognizably. A leader is more remarkable in possession of these attributes than other members of the community concerned. In addition to these standard features, Edelman argued that the leader's actions are definitive as well.

There are several theories of leadership.

Great man theory

Thomas Carlyle proposed the great man theory in the 19th century. In the views of Halaychik (2016), the great man theory contributed to creating one of the first conceptual leadership approaches. This theory asserts that there is one best leadership method and individuals with those "deeply-seated" personality characteristics are more likely to succeed in that method. This theory argues that several universal personality characteristics can determine the performance, regardless of how they behave in a particular situation. Earlier, leadership was considered as a quality that is primarily associated with males. Since leadership is perceived as a collection of typically stable personality traits, unique personality

characteristics are essential to successful leadership. Malo (2012) as well identifies that the great man theory became popular during the nineteenth century. The mythologies behind leaders, such as Abraham Lincoln, Julius Caesar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Alexander the Great, relate to how people interpret that great leaders are born and not made. The right person for the job seems to take care of the situation and lead his/her team to safety or success. Great man theories suggest that leadership is innate, implying that successful leaders are born, not created. The research about leaders as well portrays them as noble, mythical, destined, and ahead of the curve. The word "Great Man" was used because leadership in the past was thought of as a male-dominated attribute.

Contingency theory of leadership

Psychologist Fred Fiedler developed an entire contingency theory of leadership (Fiedler, 1967, as cited in Vroom, Jago, 2007). Fielder divided leaders into those motivated by the partnership and mission concerns, employing their least favored coworkers' comparatively favorable or unfavorable descriptions. The study analyzed the efficacy of these two distinct styles of leadership in eight different situational conditions generated by all combinations of three dichotomous variables: (a) leader–member interactions, (b) follower strategy structure, and (c) between leaders and position. Malo (2012) as well identifies the contingency theories of leadership as important, since it concentrates on the specific factors that decide how to lead each situation. Another view of leadership style is that no style is best in all cases. It is important to have a leadership style, qualities of followers, and situation and atmosphere in mind.

Situational leadership theory (SLT)

Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) was first formulated by John Reddin (Reddin, 1967, as cited in Vecchio, 1983). This theory indicates the need to adjust leader's leadership style to the followers' maturity level. Situational theories suggest that leaders use contextual factors to assess the best course of action. Different leadership styles can be used better to help some forms of decision-making activities. An authoritarian style is important when the leader is the most competent and experienced participant and is the best choice. When people know more about the subject matter than other participants, a democratic style is more successful (Graeff, 1983). It further explains that the leader's awareness needs to act differently towards individual group members when their relation to the whole group is significant. Hersey and Blanchard (Hersey, Blanchard, 1982, as cited in Vecchio, 1983) said that "a higher probability of success as one moves from low to moderate levels of maturity, and then begins to ineffectiveness as followers become high in task-relevant maturity". McCleskey as well noted that the situational leadership theory implies that successful leaders must recognize the situation and the most suitable response.

Behavioral leadership theory

Wofford and Liska (1993) view behavioral leadership theories that are established by scientific studies of a leader's behavior in particular circumstances in which a subject must respond according to some stimulus. The behavioral theory adds focus on the support of leadership styles and teamwork. It encourages team building by supporting individual interests and aligning individual and community goals. Malo (2012) found that leadership behavioral theories assign leaders to several actions and accomplishments. The leadership theory that is focused on behaviorism focuses on individual behaviors instead of mental states or capacities. This theory notes that people learn to become leaders by watching and educating others.

Participative leadership theory

Participative leadership is described as leaders developing a mission and their followers and working together to achieve it (Lam et al., 2015). Halaychik (2016) views participative leadership as requiring all decision-making members and its advantages for both leaders and followers. The style is as well commended for its ability to encourage more active engagement in the workplace. The followers actively look for and provide input to the participative leaders. It generates a clear sense of value for followers and job satisfaction for leaders who feel that their thoughts and actions matter. The active engagement by followers as well provides a stronger sense of cooperation, as the group achieves organizational goals and works towards the shared purpose of achieving them. Huang et al. (2010) believe that participative leadership can give followers a sense of empowerment in their work.

This research tries to identify the leadership traits of elected women representatives and analyzes how it strengthens their political leadership at the panchayat. Due to this reason, this research uses the theory of leadership by Northouse (2013). Leadership can be understood as a process that means that it is not a character in the leader, but a transaction between the leader and his/her followers. The strategy indicates that a leader is affected, and thus, it affects the followers. Without influence, leadership does not exist. Leadership happens in groups and influences a group of individuals for a common purpose, and it occurs in a small group or a community. Leadership is about one individual influencing others to meet common goals and including attention to shared objectives. Leaders lead their energy to individuals, trying to get something together. Leaders and followers have a common purpose. Listened, shared goals are an ethical transcend of leadership, because it stresses that leaders need to collaborate with their followers to achieve the chosen targets. Followers will work together for the common good with a strong leader. Moore (Moore, 1927, as cited in Rost, 1991) defined leadership as "the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation".

While discussing leadership, it is essential to identify the leadership traits. The trait approach has created a great deal of interest among researchers, which describes how the attributes affect leadership (Bryman, 1993). The below given table shows the previous studies by various scholars on the leadership traits.

Table 1. Studies on the leadership traits

Stogdill (1948)	Mann (1959)	Stogdill (1974)	Lord, DeVader, and Alliger (1986)	Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991)	Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004)	Northouse (2013)
Intelligence Alertness Insight Responsibility Initiative Persistence Self-confidence Sociability	Intelligence Masculinity Adjustment Dominance Extroversion Conservatism	Achievement Persistence Insight Initiative Self-confidence Responsibility Cooperativeness Tolerance Influence Sociability	Intelligence Masculinity Dominance	Drive Motivation Integrity Confidence Cognitive ability Task knowledge	Cognitive abilities Extroversion Conscientiousness Emotional stability Agreeableness Motivation Social intelligence Self-monitoring Emotional intelligence Problem-solving	Intelligence Self-confidence Determination Integrity Sociability

Source: Northouse, 2018

Therefore, in order to determine the leadership traits of elected women representatives at the Panchayat, this research uses Northouse's leadership traits (2018) as shown in Figure 6.
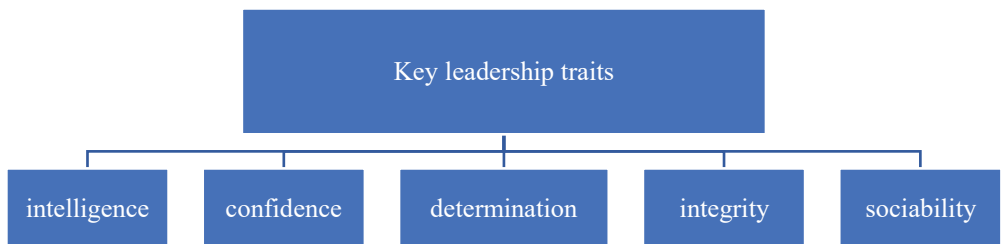
Figure 6. Leadership traits

Source: Northouse, 2018

Intelligence

In the views of Northouse (2013), leadership is positively connected to the intelligence or intellectual ability. Having good verbal ability, perceptual capability, and reasoning makes someone a better leader. While it is nice to be bright, the study as well shows that the intellectual capacity does not vary too much from the subordinates. If the leader's IQ is quite different from the followers, leadership may have a counterproductive effect. Leaders with better skills may have trouble interacting with followers, because they are concerned or too advanced to consider their thoughts.

Self-confidence

Northouse (2013) points another essential trait of an effective leader, which is being confident. Those who feel optimistic feel self-confident and believe that they will accomplish their goals. Instead of feeling unsure about their positions, they feel secure and safe. They are not second-guessing themselves but moving forward with an unobstructed vision of projects. Confident leaders feel a sense of certainty and think they do the right thing. Confidence is a trait that has to do with a positive feeling about oneself and one's ability to succeed. Self-confidence involves a sense of self-esteem, self-assurance, and confidence that can be improved. Leadership includes influencing others, and self-confidence assures the leader that his/her efforts to control others are acceptable and appropriate.

Determination

Northouse (2013) views another trait that characterizes successful leaders as their determination capacity. Determination is a commitment to accomplishing the job and incorporating initiative, persistence, leadership, and motivation. People with determination are ready to show themselves, be initiative-taking, and stand up to challenges. They determine that people are influential at times and followers must be directed (Northouse, 2013). The determined leaders are attentive to tasks and very concentrated. They known where they want to go and how they expect to get there. Determination is the key in doing the job; it requires commitment, persistence, and motivation. Individuals with ambition are eager to assert themselves, are constructive, and persevere in the face of challenges. Determining oneself sometimes includes showing dominance, especially in situations where others need direction.

Integrity

Northouse (2013) finds that integrity is another essential leadership attribute. The value of honesty and reliability is integrity. Individuals who adhere to sound values and take responsibility for their acts show honesty. Leaders with honesty inspire faith in others because they can trust that they will do what they say. They are faithful, trustworthy, and trustworthy. Honesty makes a leader dependable and dignified. Integrity is a characteristic of leaders who hold honesty and trustworthiness qualities. Individuals who adhere to a firm set of values and take responsibility for their acts show dignity. Leaders with integrity encourage faith in

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others, as they are trusted to do what they say they will do. They are faithful, straightforward, and dependable. Integrity practically makes a leader trustworthy and deserving of others' trust. While skills play a crucial role in the leadership process, the researchers have received little attention (Lord, Hall, 2005). Apart from that, they must have administrative skills and tasks requiring sufficient knowledge of managing various documentation procedures and understanding different platforms, including social media and other internet facilities for communicating with people.

Sociability

Northouse (2013) finds that sociality is the tendency of a leader to strive for friendly social ties. Leaders who embody friendliness, courtesy, compassion, and diplomacy without segregation have sociability. They are attentive to the needs of others and care for their well-being. Social leaders possess good leadership skills and establish unity with their followers. Sociability refers to the ability of a leader to shape close social connections. Citizens want sociable leaders that they will get along. They should be friendly, outgoing, courteous, cautious, and diplomatic leaders. They are sensitive to the needs of others and are concerned about their well-being. Sociable leaders possess strong people skills and help create cooperative relationships within their work environments.

A leader with good traits can be a successful political leader. Therefore, it is necessary to find leadership traits/characteristics. As the chairperson of a Panchayat governing body, women leaders have a great responsibility and importance that requires much effort to perform their duties without hindering and making them useful. A good leader, woman leader, must consider and support other colleagues who collaborate with them for the panchayat's successful governance. Moreover, following the guidelines of the officials of different departments, considering the requirements of a political party and making clear decisions for the development of the panchayat are important characteristic traits required by the women leaders. Simultaneously, they have a great responsibility as leaders to listen to the people's problems in a community, understand them, give them the guidance they need without hindrance, and solve their problems quickly. Therefore, only a good leader with sociability skills can effectively study and solve people's issues to gain respect, recognition, and support in the society.

In order to determine the leadership traits/characteristics of elected women representatives at the Panchayat in the Idukki district, as suggested by Northouse (2013), this research uses five questions to test the leadership traits. The author has developed five domains: governance, political participation, decision-making capacity, administrative skills, and influencing capability. The questions asked to the elected women representatives are given below:

1. How does Intelligence contribute to the governance in the panchayat?
2. How does Self- confidence contribute to the participation in politics at the panchayat?
3. How does Determination contribute to the decision-making at the panchayat?

4. How does Integrity contribute to the administrative ability at the panchayat?
5. How does Sociability enable influential capacity in politics at the panchayat?

Table 2. Leadership traits and domains

Leadership Traits	Five domains to analyze the traits
Intelligence	Governance
Confidence	Participation in politics
Determination	Decision-making
Integrity	Administrative skills
Sociability	Influential capacity

Source: compiled by the author, adapted from Northouse

The illustration on the theory of liberal feminism and theory of intersectional feminism and its applicability on objectives 3 and 4 are identified below.

1.1.3.3. Theoretical perspectives of feminism

The third objective of this research is to identify women political leadership's social and cultural challenges. The fourth objective is to identify men's perspective on women's political leadership. In order to find out these two objectives, the authors are using the theory of liberal feminism and the theory of intersectional feminism. Feminism as a modern political ideology was developed in the 1960s in Europe and the United States and spread to several parts of the world. Next to the ethnic and black movements and studies, feminism and women's studies formed side by side in the USA. In Assiter's (1985) views, human being's essential characteristics are mainly their needs, interests, capacities, and desires that are provided independently of their social context. Different scholars (Haslanger et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2016; Mavin, Grandy, 2019) have various interpretations of feminism that have been generally accepted and taught. People have developed their understanding of feminism to satisfy their individual needs. Feminism focuses on the equality of people in the political, economic, and social spheres. This is an integral aspect of feminist philosophy. A feminist is a person who believes in the equality of people and works for the equality of men and women in a society. There are three main types of feminism: liberal, radical, and social feminism (Beasley, 1999; Graham, 1988; Kensinger, 1997; Nes, Iadicola, 1989).

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism was a comprehensive approach of political and economic inequality, which ranges from voting rights of woman to stand in the elections, economic equality, access to the labor market, right to the education, and equal pay for both men and women. Thus, it can be seen that with all these measures, it tries to promote the equality between men and women in the political sphere as well as in

the economic sphere. Even though the concept of liberal feminism has previous antecedents, it becomes a significant and a relevant political and social position during the 1970s and 80s. The concept of liberal feminism can be defined as an ideology, in which it is attempted to promote the equality of men and women, particularly in the realm of the public sphere, and the aim is to achieve this equality through legal measures. It aims to provide equality in the public sphere by trying to provide equal access and opportunities with regard to the health care education and the work parity between men and women. However, the author of the dissertation did not put much emphasis on the aspect of equality or gender parity in the domestic spheres or private areas. One of the significant drawbacks or criticism faced by the liberal feminism is its lack of heteronormative attention and its lack of consideration and consciousness regarding the prevalence of male dominated patriarchy in this society, which dominates in the domestic or private sphere and to a large extent in the public sphere as well. Thus, it could be seen that through liberal feminism, it tries to promote the gender equality in the public's peers through legal measures, mostly by the legal actions of the state institutions or the legal and other judicial institutions, which provide fairness and justice.

Liberal feminism views that the rights and equality are granted for individuals and not for the group-based turn by providing access to the individuals rather than groups, regarding the rights and privileges. It could be seen that it is only limited to provide the rights to woman and not to any other categories of gender. According to liberal feminism, one of the main forms of discrimination of women and categorization of them not equally to men is the aspect of sexism, which is prevalent in this society. Therefore, the liberal feminism considers sexism as the fundamental aspect or the basic cost for all in the qualities, which are prevalent in the society towards women in both political and economic spheres. The category of sexism, in which women have been categorized as inferior to men by the patriarchal society, has attributed this aspect to the biological characteristics of women, which make them inferior in front of the male. The history of liberal feminist movement can be dated back to the 19th century, especially with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (Wollstonecraft, as cited in Botting, 2016) *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which has been considered as the first liberal feminist treaties together with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* work (Friedan, as cited in Muñoz, 2021), which tries to portray the sexist objective and biological orientation and categorization of women, and the significant work of John Stuart Mill *The Subjugation of Women*, in which he states that the subjugation of women is not merely inhibiting the development and growth of women but the development and growth of the human society itself. One of the significant aspects, which has to be understood regarding liberal feminism, is that unlike the critics that state that the liberal feminist want to get a higher status than men, but in reality they want to get equal rights and status and dignity in par with men in this social political and economic realm. Giddens (Giddens, 2001, as cited in Enyew, Mihrete, 2018) views liberal theory as a "feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment". Whelehan (1995) identifies that the main aim of liberal feminism,

a tendency whose history is as long and as checked as the history of progressive thought, was to give women the rights that men hold naturally. People will benefit from liberal feminism as they are not required to engage only in public life but seek the benefits that have been historically offered to women by the private sector. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on the socialization processes, defining different sex/gender roles. Any difference in male-female acts or attitudes is assumed due to the socialization and orientation to specific sex roles rather than any intrinsic biological or psychological distinction.

In the views of Camile (2020), even though liberal feminism got its political predominance during 1970s and 80s, the concept of liberal feminism has originated and has its roots in the 17th and 18th century, which at the time was as well known as the egalitarian feminism. This has a great significance in the origin and development of liberal feminism, as it is the period of transition in Hindi western world, especially in France and the United States due to the French and American revolutions, which happened at that time, which revoked the existing traditional feudal system and lead to the development of the egalitarian democratic system. There was witnessed the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law together with the capitalistic system along with the egalitarian feminism and the other two prominent concepts, which evolved during this time period, i.e., the labor and abolitionist movements. With the origin of the liberal feminism, it leads to the concept of equality and freedom, particularly in the political and economic alias, which until that time has been constrained for the common people due to the feudalistic system and monarchical rule. Camile as well noted that one of the significant aspects, which provide elements to the liberal feminism in the contemporary world is because of the continuous fight that the liberal feminism is demonstrating for the rights of women in both political and economic spheres. This is due to the fact that the liberal feminist ideology of providing political and economic rights of women through legal mechanisms is only practical in the western developed democratic world, whereas it is not possible in the dictatorial or other parts of the world, which does not provide democratic rights. These are especially significant in the case of countries, such as Islamic world, countries with dictatorial regimes, and countries which have a communist ideological rule that inhibits the basic rights of the human beings.

Liberal feminism encourages and emphasizes the need for women to come into the economic sphere by entering the labor market, thereby trying to provide financial and economic independence to women. This enables them to have a voice in the public square as well as in the domestic spheres. Moreover, liberal feminism tries to provide economic independence and justice for women with regard to various positions in the public spheres, as it can be seen that some of the lower or clerical and menial positions were confined to woman, whereas the higher and top executive positions were confined to men. This shows that even though there is unequal pay with regard to the economic aspects when it comes to the workplace, but when it comes to the positions, it can be seen that there is still a higher level of inequality when it comes to the allocation of positions in the workplace. One of the greatest significance, relevance, and novelty of this study is that even though women in the

Indian context, especially in Kerala, were able to achieve economic and other sorts of independence and equality, but there is still lack of political independence, especially at the leadership position. Therefore, this research is trying to look into the aspect of political independence, especially the leadership of women and how the idea on the concept of liberal feminism can enhance the leadership positions of women, as it tries to promote the political equality of women in the public sphere. Part of the significant aspects for the growth and development of liberal feminism in the western world is due to the vision and hard work of women leaders who were particularly educated at that time. Thus, they tried to comprehend the idea of liberalism and implement it to the feminist concept, thereby trying to provide liberals with feminist ideology, which tries to promote the political and economic equality of women together with men through the legal measures. They were trying to put an end to the sidelining mechanisms with these measures that were employed by the male counterparts through their patriarchal mindset.

In the opinion of Sangeetha et al. (2022), it can be seen that the feminists are the roots of the ideology, and even though men and women were considered as equal, but in reality, it can be seen that they were not treated equally in this society. This is mostly due to the male patriarchal mindset of the society and the socio-political activists, which hold higher positions. The origin of liberal feminism can be attributed to the aspect of feminism itself, especially in the first wave of feminism, in which the liberal feminist or the ideology of liberal feminism originated. The liberal feminist is aware of the opinion that even though men and women were created equal, the society tries to categorize them according to the sexism and biological orientations, thereby trying to discriminate them and get them less sub significance in the social political and economic realm. The history of liberal feminist movement can be dated back to the 19th century, especially with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which has been considered the first liberal feminist treaty together with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* work, which tries to portray the sexist objective and biological orientation and categorization of women, and the significant work of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women*, in which he states that the subjugation of women is not merely inhibiting the development and growth of women, but the development and growth of the human society itself. One of the significant aspects, which had to be understood regarding liberal feminism is that unlike the critics that state that the liberal feminist want to get a higher status than men, but in reality, they want to get the equal rights and status and dignity in par with men in this social, political, and economic realm.

Thus, it could be seen that with the advent of liberal ideas, the liberal feminism sprouted, which began the fight for women equality and freedom along with men. It had a great relevance during that time. Even though the countries and regions were able to come out of the clutches of the monarchical and feudal system, but the freedom and rights of women, especially political and economic, were still denied in this social political realm. The liberal feminism at that time tried to promote the equality of both men and women in the political and economic spheres. It could be seen that the idea of liberal feminism is having a great significance in this

dissertation, as this dissertation is trying to see women's political empowerment through leadership at the panchayat Raj institutions, which try to promote women's independence through leadership, thereby enabling their political participation. One of the greatest elements regarding liberal feminism in this dissertation is that liberal feminism is trying to promote the political equality of women in the public's peers; thus, this research as well tries to explore women's political independence and their development through leadership positions in the political level and in the public peers. Looking through the lens of liberal feminism, this dissertation tries to see how women were able to enhance their positions and get equality together with men in the leadership positions at the panchayat Raj institutions through political equality, which has been seen as one of the foundation pillars of liberal feminist movement across the world.

Theory of intersectional feminism

Kimberly Crenshaw, an American law professor, coined the term "intersectional feminism" in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1991). According to the professor, intersectional feminism can be defined as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other". According to the professor, the inequalities are not always unique, and it depends on how society perceives them as well as how individual and social identities can overlap, resulting in multiplicity and numerous modes of inequitable discrimination. When one tries to see the inequalities, especially trying to focus on a single aspect of inequality, excluding this inequality from other affiliations with which it can be associated, all these are trying to interlink together and get connected to this specific aspect of inequality, which society is trying to perceive and explore. Thus, the intersectional feminism tries to explore all these overlapping aspects of inequalities that are prevalent in society, thereby trying to perceive the deeper significance that can be associated with inequalities, the context it is associated with, and the relationship it helps with various social actors that have been directly inflicted by these iniquities. In this context of intersectional feminism, it can be perceived that whether this aspect of discrimination is related to gender, race, or environmental issues, there is an underlying connection and interlinkage between all these discriminations, which connect these aspects to the category of intersectional feminism.

Therefore, in this context of women's political empowerment with leadership at the local self-governance, it can be seen that the significance of intersectional feminism can be demonstrated in the context of women's political empowerment. This can be seen when talking about the aspect of political empowerment of women through leadership. It has a great number of interlinkages in society with regard to other aspects, such as sociocultural, religious, and other forms of empowerment, which gives its significance and in the languages towards gender. This complies with the aspect of intersectional feminism, which states that even though the aspect is confined to one significant category, it has interlinkages and underlying connections towards various other social and cultural aspects in the society. Regarding the global context, even though there are diverse and problematic issues

that the regions across the world are facing, these issues are diverse from region to region, when it comes to the basic aspects of society, they are unique across the world, ranging from housing, food, employment, education to basic healthcare.

This can be seen in the statements made by a prominent lesbian feminist and human rights defender from Thailand Matcha Phorn-In (UN Women, 2013) who states that if our voices are not loud enough or our presence is not visible in the social realm, our rights will be denied, and we will be forgotten forever. This shows that if the rights and needs of a particular section of society are to be achieved, they have to raise their voices and make their presence very visible in the social, cultural, and political realms. The arrival of intersectional feminism in the theoretical realm has greatly enriched feminist theory itself. There has been a great amount of debate among the scholarly community regarding the clarity of the concept of intersectionality and how it can be used in their pragmatic reality and how the solutions to various societal issues can be resolved through intersectional feminism. The concept of intersectionality has great significance in feminist theory for two reasons. Even though there are other concepts in feminist theories, the theory of intersectionality enables to distinguish and categorize among women, thereby trying to provide wider meaning to women studies. It enables to understand various aspects and categories within women's studies, such as LGBT communities and other sections of feminism and women's studies. Moreover, as the theory of intersectionality provides a convergence point by trying to provide a collaboration between various aspects of society, it enables the scholars to have an agreeing point, thereby trying to find the meaning of their studies by looking into the aspect of intersectionality, which provides a wider meaning to particular and specific study aspects.

Social critics (Brewer, Dundes, 2018; Daniels, 2015; Grzanka, 2017) say that none is more important than any other, while all inequity types are significant. Ethnicity, religion, social status, and gender are significant facets of a complex hierarchical stratification structure. UN Women (Intersectional Feminism, 2020) identify that deciphering various strands of oppression and exploitation and multi-ethnic feminism has shown that gender, race, religion, and social status are interconnected, profoundly ingrained structures of oppression and exploitation. Multi-ethnic feminism integrates a social justice standpoint. The group consciousness represents all social statuses at once. Multi-ethnic cultural feminism sees beauty in the simple and ornate artifacts that people make in daily life, such as quilts, folk songs, celebratory dances, festive foods, painted pots, weaving, and embroidery. The performances of these women in art and literature are vivid and lively.

In the opinion of Hancock (2007), rather than confining the concept of intersectionality as a "content specialization", it should be considered more as a parody, thereby trying to see the wider meaning of the concept of intersectionality, which collaborates both "normative theory and empirical research". The concepts that have been taken for the study of intersectionality have underlying connections between various other aspects of society, thereby trying to produce greater significance and impact on the lives of people. Thus, even though various aspects

have been identified individually, when it comes to the wider practical meaning of society, they have many underlying interlinkages, thereby trying to provide a common output for the lives of the public. Thus, while falling into this category, it can be seen that it is significantly meaningful to call intersectionality a normative theory with empirical implications. Looking at the academic levels of intersectionality theory, it can be seen that the academic trace towards intersectionality can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s during the time of the black feminist activist movement (Levine-Rasky, 2011). In the view of Thompson (2002), even though there were previous mass activities by the feminist movements, this moment has great significance, as it enables them to make a significant impact on the aspect of reality due to the complexities that the black women were facing in the public forum, particularly during the time when the feminist associations were predominantly headed by the white middle class national organizations for women who dominated the feministic realm. This was mainly due to the fact that the women's organizations headed the feministic moments; the major objectives of these organizations were the formal employment and education of women rather than raising the voices of depressed women in minority communities.

In the intersectional feminist aspect, there can see that women's political empowerment through leadership tries to connect these underlying phenomena, thereby trying to empower women in the political realm as well as social, cultural, and other realms. It can be seen that when women become politically empowered, they are empowering their leadership skills as well as their families about the importance of leadership qualities for women, society about the importance of respecting women's leadership and having faith in their leadership abilities, thereby providing administrative efficiency, empowering religious and other social-cultural organizations and skills and abilities of women. Another aspect regarding the intersectional feminism in women's political leadership is the changing nature and attitude of male political leaders towards the female political leadership. In this study, it can be seen that even though the previous experiences were not very favorable by the political leadership, especially towards women, the empirical study states that the attitude of men is changing towards women's political leadership and the collaborative nature that men demonstrate, especially men's leadership that was demonstrated for women's political leaders, and the hand in hand approach towards the administrative and welfare development of the panchayat. With all of these significant changes and collaborations, it is clear that women's political empowerment through leadership empowers women at the leadership level and society, cultural and religious organizations, and male counterparts' attitudes toward women's political leadership. Thus, the intersectional feminism can be seen as one of the significant theoretical aspects that can clearly identify women's political empowerment through leadership and various interlinkages and connections it exhibits in the societal realm.

Following the aspect of intersectional feminism, it provides the foundations and pillars, through which the structural inequalities can be removed, thereby trying to rebuild society and offering equality and empowerment for all the sections of society. With regard to women's political empowerment through leadership, the

foundation or pillar stone regarding women's political empowerment can be seen in the Panchayati Raj Act of 1993, through which women's political empowerment became a reality. However, the real significance, which provides the fairness and transparency in women's political empowerment through leadership, is the interlinkages, which connect various inequalities in society and aspects through which women's political empowerment tries to eradicate them through leadership.

Radical feminism

According to the opinion of various scholars (Mackay, 2015; Rhodes, 2012; Thompson, 2001), radical feminism is where the seeds that help to shape the feminist philosophy are sown. Radical feminism was the most important feminist ideology of the 1960s and the early 1970s. It is no longer as widely recognized as it was then and is no longer used to describe feminism exclusively. This group considers women's oppression as the most critical pressure that cuts through race, culture, and economic class borders. This is a mass movement seeking to bring revolutionary social change. Radical feminism asks why women must depend on men to survive, just as it questions why men must rely on women. Radical feminism seeks to distinguish gender roles from biological forces to liberate both men and women as much as possible from their previous gender roles. McRobbie (2009) identifies that culture is often used to explain injustice and how mainstream culture normalizes subordinating behaviors.

Socialist feminism

Socialist feminism seeks to resolve women's shortcomings in a contemporary system by reflecting on capitalism and patriarchy (Cronin, 2007). It is about how women have been dependent on men. Capitalism is perceived as an institution focused on benefiting a private class at the public's expense. It initiates forms of conflict within groups. The connection between those courses and culture is as well found across institutions. The alliances and distinctions between classes are sometimes not as straightforward as they often seem and may change frequently. However, the underlying antagonism between classes will continue until there is no longer a minority possessing the productive means of production and benefiting from the rest's labor (Eisenstein, 1999; Nes, Iadicola, 1989).

Apart from that, there are other types of feminism that are described below.

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism is a feminist philosophy that expands the theory of feminism. Marxist feminism explores the relationship between women and capitalism and examines the relationship between women and property. Marxist feminism is a collection of ideas that have grown from the intersection of Marxism and feminism. Marxism and feminism concentrate on the systemic disparities resulting in oppressed people's oppression (Gimenez, 1975; MacKinnon, 1982; Sheivari, 2014).

Cultural feminism

The scholars (Alcoff, 1988; Hekman, 1999) identify cultural feminism as a theory that asserts that there are inherent differences between males and females and how those differences make women's differences more critical. This theory of feminism claims that there are variations in male and female biology. "Women are kinder and gentler than men". Cultural feminism is the ideology that wants to eradicate patriarchy through promoting women's unique attributes, women's ways, and women's perspectives, sometimes claiming that the "woman's way" is the best.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is the study on how women and nature are connected and how they are handled in a political, social, historical, epistemological, and philosophical context (Bradshaw, 2017; Glazebrook, 2014). Ecofeminism views patriarchal society as a system that has evolved over the last 5,000 years, thus considering matriarchal societies (a society in which females are the core of the social roles and systems) to be the original hierarchy (Salleh, 2017; Shiva, Mies, 2014).

Individualist feminism or libertarian feminism

Individualist feminism emphasizes the individual or libertarian values of a smaller government. The emphasis is on the freedom, liberty, independence, and diversity of students. Individualist feminism focuses on men and women and how the obstacles are due to their gender (Davies, 1987; Morgan, 2005).

Moderate feminism

As a subset of feminist studies, women's studies are primarily inhabited by young women and women who lack explicit personal encounters with sexism. They argue that the values of feminism movement are obsolete and thus challenge the continued need for more work (Lewis et al., 2016; Marx, 2019; Mavin, Grandy, 2019; Tzanakou, Pearce, 2019).

Feminism in India

The idea of feminism as a movement is associated with different fields of research and cultural movements. The deterioration in the importance of women's worth is evidenced in every area of life. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Chipko movement (Kumar, 2014) was a prominent political and environmental movement in northern India and is widely cited as a primary example of active grassroots activism. The feminist philosophy of liberation questions women's role and the superiority of patriarchy over women (Basu, 1995).

Gandhi's non-violent methods contributed to the women's inclusion in the national freedom movement (Thapar, 1993). Women family members of Congress leaders set their purdah aside and started engaging in public events and rallies. The scholars (Patel, Khajuria, 2016) have found that many households permitted women to take political risks at some stage, which allowed them to gain control gradually, and during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, the educated middle-class women became influential in student, youth, workers, peasants, tribal, Dalits, and

civil liberties movements and played the central role. In order to distinguish themselves from benevolent males' conservative paternalism, the radical feminists proclaimed themselves as the warriors for women's rights (Heywood, 1998). Since the late 1990s, Indian feminists have advocated for reserved elections for women in the assembly, the upper house, and the state and national assemblies (Sharma, 1998).

The feminist movement is part of the third wave of feminism and is marked by post-structuralist perspectives on gender and sexuality (Kinser, 2004). They critique the male–female stereotypes that have been designed to manipulate non-dominant classes (Mann, Huffman, 2005). Thirdly, the wavers argue that it helps women to describe feminism by taking their views into account, personalities into the belief structure of feminism (Garrison, 2004). In India, the most severe problem that women face is the underrepresentation of women and women's interests in developing the hegemonic portrayal of Indian culture (Banerjee, 2014; Fernandes, 1999; Patel, 2016).

Since liberal feminism seems to be strongly associated with the third and fourth objectives, it is crucial to identify this theory's specificity. The liberal feminist argument is that the main attraction is that a woman should determine her social role with greater freedom than a man. It is supposed that women are free to decide on their social roles, and men, as rational creatures, can use logic to determine good morals and selfish interests. Traditionally, liberal philosophy has been seen the need to split human resources between public and private spheres. Women, as a community, have been historically identified with the private sector. They have unjustly denied of entry to the public domain with the ability to exploit their generous creature capacity fully. In this view, women are released when barriers to the participation in public-sector activities are removed, and their civil rights are guaranteed. Competence evaluation should be individual, not as a community, and women's features should be used to achieve this degree of fairness and equality. Combined with the progressive commitment to freedom of speech as a fundamental right, liberal feminists dispute with socialist feminists and others on pornography and censorship. Liberal feminists argue in favor of full freedom of expression and tactics, such as female-centered pornography to address the demeaning impact of female pornography. Liberal feminism's efforts are directed at patriarchal reform rather than the systemic transformation in a male-dominated society. Liberal feminists support the amendment to equal rights and other legislative acts aimed at abolishing sexual discrimination and eroding oppressive gender roles.

Cornell (1991) claims that sexuality determines the limits of women's governmental and social power. Liberalism eliminates women's oppression from discourse through a private call and offers women rights that they see as the self-employed individuals that they want to see. In many political spheres, women were sexualized and objectified. This has increased the gender inequality. Therefore, it is necessary to make a gender-neutral concept equal to men in power structures in the political sphere. Liberal feminists claim that the personal autonomy practice relies on some supportive factors that are insufficiently present in women's lives or that the social systems often struggle to promote women's autonomy and other aspects of women's advancement. They as well claim that women's needs and aspirations are

insufficiently reflected in the essential circumstances in which they live. They lack legitimacy, because women are inadequately represented in democratic self-determination processes.

Liberal feminists claim that such autonomy deficits are due to the "gender system" (Okin, 1991) or the patriarchal nature of hereditary traditions and institutions. The women's movement should strive to identify and repair them. As protecting and fostering citizens' autonomy is the state's proper position on the liberal view, liberal feminists argue that the state can and should be women's movement partner, supporting women's autonomy. However, liberal feminists disagree about the value of personal independence in a good life, the proper position of the state, and how to explain liberal feminism.

In organizational studies, liberal feminists advocated removing discrimination and racism and introducing equality rules. The organizations are viewed as gender-neutral, and if effectively managed, gender equality can be achieved. The belief is that sexist prejudices and discriminatory policies and practices obstructing hierarchical institutions' proper functioning upset the capitalist labor market rationality. Liberal feminism encourages the development of meritocratic institutional frameworks that concentrate on individual qualities rather than gender. While liberal feminist research favors gender-neutral positivist epistemologies, qualitative case study research often endorses this theoretical framework. This type of feminist analysis as well focuses on the sex segregation prevalence and reasons for such segregation. Gender is considered a variable in research design, and typically, a comparison of male and female workers is performed.

Liberal vision plays a significant role in protecting and uplifting citizen autonomy and therefore promotes women's independence. The ample proposition is that political, social, and economic development requires the equality of people with equal roles and participation in decision-making. Therefore, through the Panchayati Raj system established in India, liberal feminism in a society, i.e., giving women the same status in the Constitution and providing political support, is vital for their sustainable development. It has been noticed that the topic of equality has somehow vanished from the public discourse since the late nineteenth century. To an extent, this was due to a movement towards objectizing femininity for revival purposes. It is as well noteworthy that the entire country is fundamentally patriarchal, and Indian women lack freedom (Kumar, 2014). The explanation of female liberation falls from the public agenda of nineteenth-century nationalist agitation because political control questions are overtaken (Doezema, 2001). The right to personal freedom is organizing liberal feminism as an autonomous political autonomy to set discretion, help to direct life. It is not often the case for women in women's social settings in the lives of others. Other aspects of women's prosperity are respected. Feminists say that the characteristics of diverse cultures act as a barrier. Liberal feminism says that it is necessary to address such issues as democratic governance to its fullest extent. Liberal feminists assert that patriarchy inherent in various societies is due to the absence of traditions and cultures. Women lose their place and are regarded as the lower classes of society (Becker, 2010).

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Therefore, the central aim of the liberal feminist approach is to identify gender inequality in all social and organizational life facets and examine individual, social, and organizational factors, perpetuating such disparities. A substantial body of work has developed a "glass ceiling" presence in organizations, which is supposed to represent an invisible and impenetrable barrier that prevents women from reaching senior roles in organizational hierarchies. There is substantial evidence of horizontal and vertical gender disparity in organizations worldwide, showing that most women are employed by men in different occupations and are much more likely to be used at lower organization levels. This evidence of segregation forces liberal feminists to pursue a change to combat workplace gender inequality. Much emphasis seems to be made on the political and legal reform (Rottenberg, 2014).

In order to achieve the third objective, which is to identify women's political leadership's social and cultural challenges, the author used John Stuart Mill's theory of Liberal Feminism and theory of intersectional feminism (Mill, 1998; Kimberlé, Crenshaw, 1989). The famous liberal philosopher, publicist, politician, and scientist John Stuart Mill defended a fair society. According to Mill (Mill, 1869, as cited in Gerson), the principle which governs the current social relations between the two sexes, the legal subordination of one sex to the other, is misguided and is one of the critical obstacles to human development nowadays, and this should be substituted by a principle of complete equality, which does not recognize authority, privileges, or incapacity. He said that in freedom, the balance between government power and individuality is vital. Mill advocates for a less oppressive government, making women more individual and thus improving their wellbeing. He defined sex roles as a sort of caste system, in which women are given lower status and are limited merely by their sex in what they can do, despite of the absence of any categorical distinction that explains it. This hindered women's individual growth that stopped them from understanding their capabilities, which is only possible with the right to seek their welfare.

Mill notes that women's subordination is one of the leading obstacles to human enhancement. Mill points out that women's inequality has detrimental effects on women's lives and men, thus stopping society from advancing. Mill believes that women must be viewed as equal to advance the society. This is because all

disparities constitute a hindrance to the advancement of a whole society and are obstacles to the individual progress. This correlates to the liberal and practical views of Mill to be effective in their happiness and thereby contribute to the society's growth. Mill justifies the need for women's emancipation to create their talents. He claims that women's core issue is that leading life has denied them of free and fair choice.

Despite being a democracy, India still has a wide range of socio-cultural issues for women to prioritize in politics and recognize their leadership, according to the John Stuart Theory. Contemporary socio-cultural conditions that will govern the relations between men and women will be a significant obstacle to one section's growth and may lack development in another area. Even if the status and equality are legally recognized, it remains to be seen whether elected women leaders in the panchayats will exercise their power and use it for social development. This study looks at how various socio-cultural barriers for women leaders in the local government hinder them from fulfilling their responsibilities properly; thus, a detailed inquiry into such barriers is needed (Donner, 1993; Lee, 2000). It is not suitable for the development of women, who cannot utilize their leadership due to the socio-cultural issues in the panchayat raj system, allowing them to grow as political leaders who achieve substantial success. In the Idukki district, it is essential to analyze the importance that women in the hilly areas receive in society, whether they have reached a higher standard of education or they are among those who are engaged in agriculture for the economic security. Education, financial security, recognition among the people in society, cooperation of the family, alliance of various political parties, and male leaders working in the LSG provide a socio-cultural background. Still, it should be learnt how these are empowering women leaders. Liberal feminism as well states that it is an excellent principle that the status of the people or the socio-cultural status of the people in power should not be an obstacle to the progress of a human being. Therefore, there must not be any socio-cultural barriers to the maximum power utilization for women leaders that have been elected to the Panchayat leader's post. Therefore, this theory is very relevant to this study.

In order to find out the fourth objective, which is to identify men's perspective on women's political leadership, the author used John Stuart Mill's theory of Liberal Feminism and theory of intersectional feminism by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Verba et al. (Verba et al., 1995, as cited in Brady et al., 1995; Van Deth, 2001) defines political participation as an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing public action, either directly by influencing the making of the public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of political decision-makers. However, Coffe and Bolzendahl (2011) say that in the sphere of political participation, women do face various challenges to have access to the political participation and leadership, since gender differences in participation are the result of disparities in the stockpile of factors that facilitate participation, not the gender differences in the way participatory factors are converted into activity. These facilitating factors include male support for women to engage them in politics, support of women in voting for

women leaders, and accept women leaders, assuming a women's leadership and supporting women without any preconditioned stigma and inequality.

The ILO (Corona, Gammage, 2017) has recognized the value of engaging men at the household, community, and policy level in interventions of women's economic empowerment (WEE), and women's entrepreneurship growth (WED) is gaining more awareness among the development practitioners. Male family members can serve as economic empowerment "gatekeepers" for women by giving them access to money, knowledge, and networks that are otherwise out of reach due to the context-specific gender barriers. Duflo (2012) points out those expanding women's opportunities, particularly in health, education, work, rights, and political participation reduces the gender disparity and contributes to women's growth. However, men have more access to leadership and control over position and power in a broader context. Even in their house or society, men possess a much higher capacity than women in most regions. Thereby, men have more bargaining power, numerous services, and products than women. In the case of politics and party activism, the same philosophy has been applied.

There are higher percentages of men as members and leadership positions in most political parties, but lesser women's presence result in a lesser chance for leadership. Even in some societies, e.g., in India, though there is a certain amount of women's participation, they may not be promoted to a higher position and leadership due to the lack of support from the male party members or leaders during the election time. Therefore, women lose their chance to be a leader. A study by Madsen (2012) suggests that men should become allies who recognize and collaborate with women to foster equality between men and women. Men may as well be co-beneficiaries, as patriarchal attitudes enhance strict masculine expectations dictating how men can conduct themselves and restrict people's role in their families and communities. They as well ensure that no society will flourish when half of the population is hindered from achieving economic, social, or political potential.

A study by Richardson (2018) and Schuler et al. (2010) identified that men have the essential knowledge to share women's empowerment and play a crucial role in empowering women. A husband can do a lot to promote or limit women's empowerment and restrict women's opportunities as independent individuals. The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) (2005) identified the existence and control of men's political structures as a significant barrier to women's fair treatment. Therefore, men must play an essential role in increasing women's visibility and involvement in various sectors, including politics. They as well suggest that men themselves will play a key role in fostering policy progress on gender equality. As partners, they will help women's efforts and campaigns to achieve equality.

In most cases, men could use their power to promote women and support their entry into politics. Therefore, it is as well vital to encourage and educate men to empower women to participate in governance. It is as well necessary to have a fair representation of people in decision-making bodies, since it will be a crucial

component of governance democracy. The male must realize female members' potentials and thus produce a more democratic and just society.

Mill's idea of liberal feminism is to give equality to people in a democratic system. Therefore, men must strive to understand the importance of gender equality and ensure women's political representation in their society. Only such societies can increase the male leader's cooperation with female leaders and work together for social service at their panchayats. When the male colleagues working in a female-led panchayat do not accept or understand the importance of gender equality, it is tough for such an LSG to run its administrative function properly without any issues. Sometimes, women leaders have to face various verbal insults or demotivation from male leaders. There is a complete misconception that women got into power only through the PRI system and subsequent 50% reservations for women in local bodies. They will be ruling only the household. When the male leaders have such stereotypical ideas, it is not prospective for a panchayat and women leader's encouragement into decision-making power. Therefore, a woman leader must gain support and full cooperation of their co-workers and male colleagues to function efficiently.

It often happens in a society that it is thought that women leaders that are elected to the panchayat do not have the leadership skills, that they are incompetent, that they cannot fulfill their responsibilities without the help of a man, and that women can perform the duties of a family properly but not the political career. Such a patriarchal approach is harming women and negatively affecting the leadership abilities of women. Thus, it is essential that the male society agrees and tries to change their negative perception of women and accept women's leadership at the panchayat. Besides, many people still think that a male leader can cooperate with higher officials than women. A male leader can as well organize various political activities more than a woman. Sometimes, women leaders face society's challenges if they do not have previous knowledge and political participation. This will increase the female leader's comparability with males, and the organization will consider a male as their leader than a female. The reality is that once a woman gets a chance to lead and prove leadership, male society will later change their perception and accept women as equal to men. Moreover, there is still a widespread thinking that women leaders will have to try a lot to manage their family life and political life together than males if they do not choose leadership. Due to many preconceived notions about the female leadership in a society, women tend to work a lot to prove themselves than male leaders and prove their integrity. Often, when studying women's empowerment, there is a considerable lack of discussion on men's role in women's advancement and development. Therefore, in this research, the author is trying to identify the part of elected male representative's role in supporting and encouraging women leaders at their panchayat and trying to analyze how the male representatives view the political empowerment of women by using the theory of liberal feminism and the theory of intersectional feminism, since it is ensuring the importance of gender equality. This study will determine the male representative role in gender equality at the panchayat with an empirical research.

1.1.4. Theoretical model of research on women's political empowerment

The theoretical model of this dissertation research on women's political empowerment is given in Figure 7.
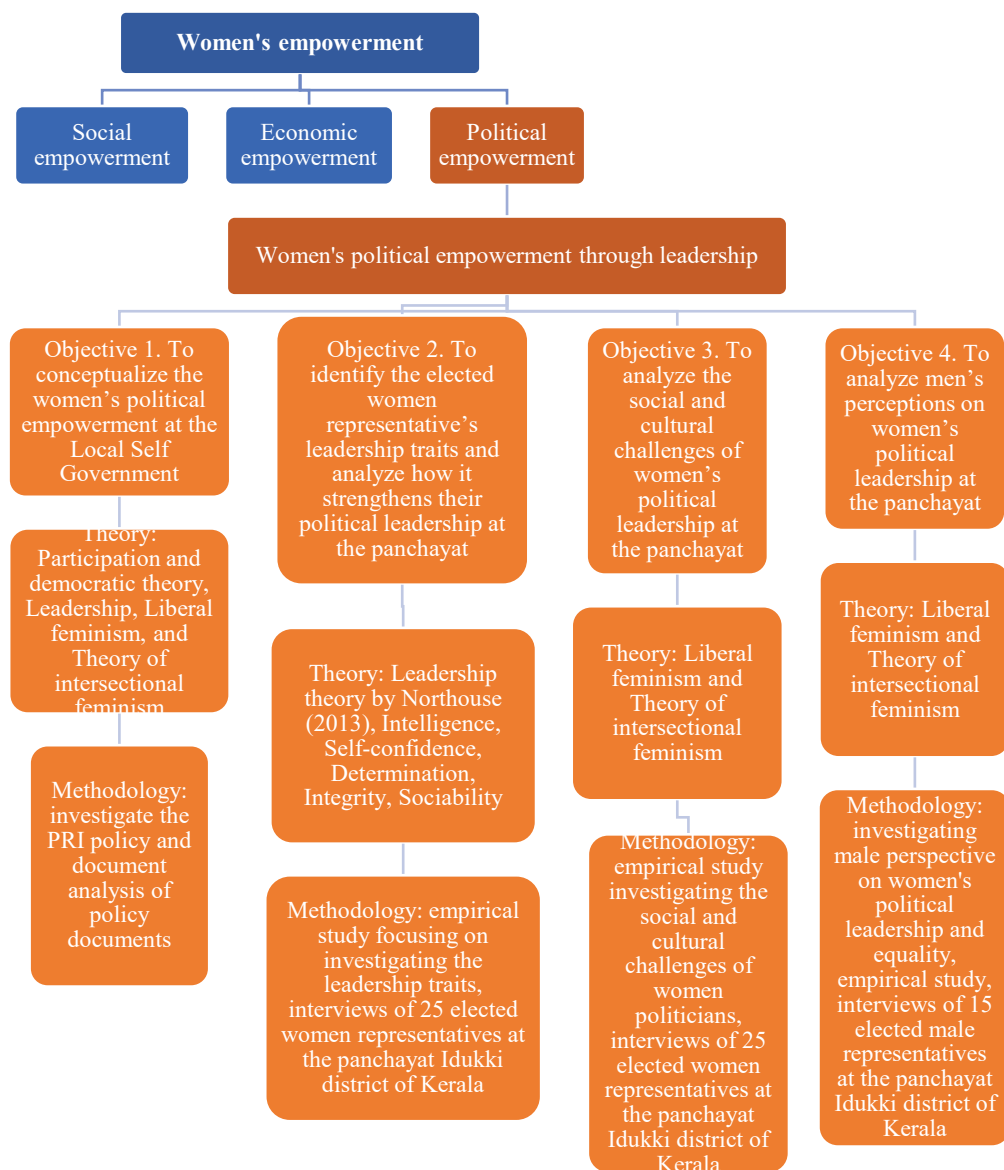
Figure 7. Theoretical model of research on women's political empowerment

Source: created by the author

The above presented theoretical model of research shows that this dissertation focuses on identifying women's political empowerment through leadership. Using four theories, the author tries to explore the important theoretical perspectives on

women's empowerment and political leadership. In order to identify the leadership traits of elected women representatives, the leadership theory is used in the research. The investigation of various social and cultural challenges for women's political empowerment is as well identified by using liberal feminism. It is as well important to acknowledge male's perspective on women's equality and political empowerment through leadership. Hence, the liberal feminism theory is used for this objective as well. Therefore, it is possible to determine women's political empowerment through their local self-government leadership by investigating these four important objectives.

This chapter shows that women's empowerment and political empowerment are considered especially important. Gender equality is the right of all people. A woman should have the capacity to live with dignity and autonomy. Empowering women helps to save lives and makes people more involved. Motivated women are happier and more active members of their families and communities, helping the next generations. Gender equality is significant because it is included in the first Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. Gender equality has been recognized as a prerequisite to achieve other seven UN Millennium Development Goals. While discrimination against women is increasingly socially unacceptable, it is still the most prevalent and enduring form of discrimination. The empowerment and leadership of women in the recovery process should be at the center of recovery efforts. Women's expertise, information about their cultures and achievements should be honored and widely recognized. By engaging women in recovery planning and implementation, cultivating their potential to become recovery leaders, and fostering their interests in recovery, their capacity to become recovery leaders will be encouraged. Women's empowerment is the most important part of every culture, economy, or country. The education to motivate women will encourage a cheerful outlook towards women and their inclusion in social, economic, and political spheres equally as men.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presents a study on the political empowerment of elected women representatives at the Local Self Government institutions through their leadership at the panchayat. In order to analyze the elected women's leadership in detail, a case analysis and access to qualitative methods are applied. The study uses qualitative document analysis. The qualitative document review may focus on recorded correspondence, such as interview transcripts, speeches, evaluation protocols, videotapes, documents, etc. A document analysis of the Panchayati Raj Institutions policy and elected representative's duties and responsibilities are identified as well.

The duties and responsibilities of a women's political representative given by the Panchayati Raj Institution creates a wide range of opportunities to excel in the panchayat's political career and decision-making processes, leading to more vital leadership abilities. Akchurin and Lee (2013b) identify that women's organizations with access to structural politics, either through direct lobbying or links with unions or professional associations, have been the most active in supporting gender equality. Many researchers have identified a considerable difference in women's political and economic rights, power structures, and resources than men. The researchers have examined women's politics and the consequences of women's political involvement (Kunovich, Paxton, 2005), including the relations between women's movements and governance structures. Clemens (1993) and Bali Swain and Wallentin (2012) say that it is necessary to learn how women's organizations facilitate structural reform in the political arena. Gibney et al. (2009) explain how the organizational structure, strategic capacity, leadership, and other campaigns affect women's election results. Others center their attention on how the political and cultural environments, in which the protests arise, mediate the effects of collective action. Most analyses study the political consequences, frequently breaking down the policy cycle into various phases in order to achieve a more fine-grained view of the periods when campaigns are likely to affect the government (McCammon, Banaszak, 2018). The women's advocacy style illustrates the gender politics dominated by a political paradigm that underscores fair opportunities and equal legal protections.

2.1. Data collection method and sources

The Panchayati Raj Institutions act of the Republic of India regulates the functions of elected representatives' roles at the local self-government institutions. Article 40 of the Constitution, which enshrines one of the Directive Principles of State Policy, lays down that the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as it may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. In the light of the experience in the last forty years, and given the shortcomings observed, it considers an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic and essential features of Panchayati Raj Institutions to impart certainty, continuity, and strengthen them. All information on

the institution's activities, performing the functions assigned by the legal acts, must be followed in every panchayat.

Every local self-government leader (in this study, they are the panchayat presidents) must participate in local government and disseminate information in an organized way, considering the decision-making strategies at their respected panchayats. Various political scientists use a document analysis method to find the in-depth meaning of multiple aspects, such as documents. There is always a chance of having various debates and speeches time by time in the political realm, hence addressing governments around the world document analysis that is efficient. In order to identify various objectives, detailed knowledge from written records, audio, video recordings, or other media sources have been reviewed. Text research concepts are similar to those of formal evaluation. While drafting laws and measures, especially in this study, the Panchayati Raj Institution policy act and its benefits for women, analyzing the act's overall content, are required. In a governance system, there are various committee hearings. The meeting takes place, especially in a panchayat. It is unavoidable to conduct meetings with multiple ward members and panchayat authorities to identify the developmental programs that are required or discussions on the funding allocation. Therefore, it is essential to use document analysis (Baumgartner et al., 2011). The research data reveal the main components for evaluating the Panchayati Raj Institution policy's impact on the elected women representatives' leadership through their governance and decision-making capacity.

Document analysis

Qualitative Document Analysis is a method of research that systematically analyzes documents and their content. Such an approach is one of the most important research methods in political science research to facilitate the analysis of the policies and identify the objectives of the document. This research method as well finds a way to evaluate the information that has been found as part of the research and its potential in writing on a quality basis. Such an evaluation is possible through a variety of interpreted approaches. In the view of the Wach and Ward (2013), the QDA process itself can help initiatives to refine and/or further develop their ideal practices and policies. In the view of Judith, edited by Frey (2018), the process of analyzing documents in order to find answers to particular research questions is known as document analysis. Document analysis, similar to other qualitative research methods, necessitates the repeated review, examination, and interpretation of data in order to acquire meaning and an empirical understanding of the construct that is being studied. Moreover, the author says that the documents of all kinds can help researchers to gain new insights, develop theories, and understand their subjects' better, keeping in mind that all documents exist within the context of their time and place of creation.

Therefore, as part of this research, the author has adopted qualitative data analysis to observe the issues of women who are in the political realm, which are socially relevant issues, and study them in-depth, examine various criteria, and understand the legal system that is used to give women political prominence in

India. As a result, it was possible to understand various aspects of the existing political laws in India and the responsibilities of the Local Self-Government Institutions through PRI policy. In this research, the author used both primary and secondary data analysis. Through first-person accounts, the author was able to observe the activities and responsibilities of elected officials at PRI institutions in Idukki, in which the author was analyzing various policy documents, reports, and studies on the RI policy report.

According to Karppinen and Moe (2012), a document can reveal the author's interests and intentions as well as facts about the policy process; thus, the responsibilities of each LSG division were clearly understood in this study by using the PRI policy analysis. Since the author was studying PRI policy documents, it was possible to use this research method to understand the relevance of the study for many people and evaluate various laws from the official sources. In different countries, they have various laws for women's political empowerment. However, when it comes to the Indian context, due to its larger population and different legal systems for the political significance of women in this country, using the QDA, the author was able to find out the regulations in various states, especially in Kerala, since it was the study area. Through the QDA, the author was able to understand the Panchayati Raj Act in such a broad way and derive various written reports, various pictures, and videos on the PRI policy importance, especially those released by the Government of Kerala.

In addition, there were many legal documents that gave importance to women's political empowerment in the state of Kerala and the Legislative Assembly records, which were available on the online website of the Kerala Government. They were as well helpful in identifying the importance of PRI policy and the number of elected female representatives in each district in the state of Kerala.

Thus, in order to identify such official records, it was important to find quality resources that are genuine and approved by the government. Hence, through the qualitative data analysis, the author was able to explore more details and statistical reports on it, especially the number of local election participants, candidates, and winners, as well as the number of parliamentary election winners from Kerala Election Commission report on 2015 and 2020.

Therefore, it was possible to identify the role of women in the political sphere in the state of Kerala, and the author was able to compare the scenario with other states in India.

The local editions of the Panchayat Raj Magazine, which had been published by the Central Government during the Third Five Year Plan, were published in the local language in the beginning of August in 1961. The Panchayat Raj magazine became a part of the panchayat administration when the strong panchayat rule was established in Kerala. The journal primarily publishes articles, studies, features, development reports, news, and explanations on authentic and current village governance rules, regulations, and guidelines. This publication raises awareness of panchayat governance among panchayat committees, government officials, and the general public. Thus, the author was analyzing this magazine from the website

(Panchayat Raj Magazine, Local Self Government Department) of the Kerala government.

Apart from that, in this study, the author was conducting qualitative interviews with women and men's representatives who were elected as members of the local self-government in the district of Idukki in Kerala and by identifying their perceptions and opinions about the efficacy and efficiency of leadership at the local level. In their place, the author was able to identify the importance of Punjab's institutions policy. In this regard, the author believes that by using the qualitative data analysis strategy, it was possible to identify the importance of PRI policy and various opportunities and challenges for the elected female leaders that they are facing during their terms in a panchayat.

Qualitative document analysis (QDA) was chosen to understand PRI policy. The "qualitative document analysis is a research method for rigorously and systematically analyzing written documents' contents. The approach is used in political science research to facilitate impartial and consistent analysis of written policies" (Wach, 2013). The main documents used as a part of QDA were the following:

1. Panchayati Raj Institutions Act and Regulations issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

2. Kerala Panchayati Raj Act 1944, Government of Kerala.

Then, the author used document analysis to identify PRI policy implications and effectiveness and how it changed women's participation in local self-government.

The document analysis was collected from such sources:

1. Panchayat Raj Magazine, Government of Kerala, Local Self Government Department.

2. Local Body Elections 2020, State Election Commission Kerala.

3. Panchayat level activities for women through Kudumbashree Mission, Government of Kerala.

4. Panchayat Raj: Some Facts/Good Practices in Kerala.

Therefore, this qualitative data analysis through the interview was very helpful in finding out various aspects of women's political leadership at the local self-government. Hence, the qualitative data analysis was very useful for the dissertation.

Interviews

For the empirical study, the author has chosen the interview method. In Kvale's (1996) views, compared to the questionnaires, interviews enable researchers to examine people's perceptions more thoroughly. When it comes to the importance of qualitative interviews, Flick et al. (2004) view that qualitative interviews are commonly used in social science; they are particularly relevant to the interpretative methods because of the prevalence of situational definitions and motivations for intervention as well as using interpretations for normal or accessible discourse, everyday concepts and scenarios benefit from empirical research. Since the author identifies political empowerment through the leadership of elected women representatives in this research, the qualitative interview analysis is employed.

Bryman et al. (1996) as well identify that more qualitative analysis is employed in leadership studies and is suitable for observing everyday discourse.

The principle of goodwill ensured that the interviewee had a research-friendly environment and pleasant communication. The autonomy principle ensures that the subjects who decided to participate in the study were not influenced. The principle of awareness provides the subjects with sufficient knowledge about the study's conduct and objectives. The principle of confidentiality ensures that personal data and other private information are not disclosed. Therefore, the subjects' names are not disclosed in the study, replaced by letter and number codes.

This research uses a case study of Kerala state in India to find out the second, third, and fourth objectives. The study uses an interview method to determine the specifics of the role of elected women representatives at the panchayat administration and evaluate their leadership abilities and challenges. In Longhurst's (2003) opinion, "a semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important". Semi-structured interviews are casual conversations, similar to talking to people in a partly structured way. In Yin's (2011) views, interviews are in-depth observations in which the interviewer seeks to get some information from the respondent. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to develop in-depth accounts of individual experiences and perceptions (Cousin, 2009).

In this research, the duration of each interview is between 1 and 4 hours. All interviews were recorded as texts or voice recordings, then transcribed, and encoded. The interview questions were focused on the three main objectives:

1. To identify various leadership traits of elected women representatives at the panchayat,
2. To identify the social and cultural challenges for elected women representatives at the panchayat,
3. To identify the elected male representative's perception of women's leadership at the panchayat.

Sample and interviewees profiles

In order to evaluate the significance of women's political empowerment through leadership due to the Panchayati Raj Institution policy, this study conducted primary data collection from the south Indian state that is known as Kerala. It is a state with an estimated population of 35 million, according to the Government of India's census (2011), covering the area of 38863 km^2 (Government of Kerala), with 14 districts. In order to accomplish the full review of elected women's political leadership, this research chose one district, Idukki, from Kerala, where the presidents of panchayats were chosen from 2015 to October, 2020.

Idukki is one of 14 districts of Kerala State, India, created on January 26, 1972. About 66% of the state power supply comes from Idukki's Hydroelectric Power Projects. Idukki, located in Kerala's Western Ghats, is the second-largest

district, but it has the lowest population. Idukki has 52 village panchayats in total (Government of Kerala, Idukki). In the panchayats, there are 50% of women's seats reserved. In the district of Idukki, 25 panchayats in total were led by women presidents. The qualitative semi-structured interviews with women presidents were in Malayalam's language, Kerala's official language. The qualitative interview asked the respondents to describe the real-life situation of their career as a politician and their prospects and different impediments for performing their leadership; more information was obtained about the direction sought with the open-ended inquiries and discussions. Additionally, the interviewer studied the presidents' activities at the panchayats and noted their everyday work habits at the direct interview time. Moreover, in order to find out the male perspective on women's political empowerment, the elected male panchayat representatives who were president/vice-president/ward members from the Idukki district were interviewed as part of this research.

In order to identify various leadership traits of elected women representatives at the panchayat, this research uses five important leadership traits proposed by Northouse (2013):

1. Intelligence,
2. Confidence,
3. Determination,
4. Integrity,
5. Sociability.

It was aimed to find out how these five leadership traits of elected women representatives enable them to be politically empowered. In this research, the author will be using five domains: governance, participation in politics, decision-making, administrative skills, and influential capacity at their panchayat. In the below given Table 3, there is an outline of important question that has been discussed with the elected women representatives at the panchayat. By identifying the answers to these questions, this research will be analyzing various leadership traits of elected women presidents at their panchayat and how it is related with their political empowerment at the given five domains, such as governance, participation in politics, decision-making, administrative skills, and influential capacity at their panchayat.

Table 3. Categorization of questions for the elected women leaders

Categorization of questions for the elected women leaders
1. Political background, how many times, family's political background
2. About PRI, women's role in politics, additional responsibilities, gender inequality
3. Opportunities to express decision-making, funding, division of finance, efficiency in the allocation of funding
4. Questions to people in the Grama Sabhas, answers, solutions, welfare policies
5. Leadership or membership in other organizations, experiences, challenges, role model

6.	KILA training, other training, the language barrier
7.	Social and leadership status before and after being elected
8.	Emotional intelligence in meetings or decisions
9.	Cooperation with other Panchayats, leaders, political influence, party influence, authority influence in duties
10.	Programs for women, children, SC/ST, other backward class
11.	Women's protection, violence against women, domestic violence, Jagratha Samiti, Asha worker, police and legal department support, women's commission role
12.	Women leaders, corruption, prevention of corruption
13.	2018 natural calamity, shelter homes, roles, challenges, finance, support from higher authority, support from co-members and staff as well as the family
14.	Opinion on women's wall movement, how many women went, to which place, who took the initiative Panchayat/party basis
15.	Opinion about being in the next election as a candidate, do they need power for social service

Source: created by the author

Each leadership trait analyzes various indicators and aims to find out how the elected women representative's leadership trait enables them to achieve political empowerment. According to Northouse (2013), each trait and corresponding indicator are given below in Table 4.

Table 4. Analytical dimension and indicators of leadership

Indicators associated with leadership traits				
Indicators of intelligence	*Indicators of confidence*	*Indicators of determination*	*Indicators of integrity*	*Indicators of sociability*
Verbal ability	Self-esteem	Constant social presence	Honesty	Friendly
Perceptual ability	Self-assurance	Initiative	Trustworthiness	Outgoing
Reasoning skills	Making differences	Persistence	Have principles	Courteous
Communication skills	Influencing others	Dominance	Take responsibility	Diplomatic
Higher IQ	Behavior in public	Proactive	Dependable	Socially sensitive
Problem-solving skills	Openness to experiences	Perseverance	Technical skills and innovative ideas	Concern to others
				Understanding skills

Source: Northouse, 2013

The goal is to determine if the respondents at the LSG required five leadership traits that have been suggested by Northouse (2013). In order to find out each trait, the author used multiple questions that were semi-structured. Based on the findings, the author has distributed each trait into different indicators as given in the table.

A semi-structured interview was conducted to identify various social and cultural challenges of elected women representatives at the panchayat as a leader. While interviewing respondents at the panchayat, the author has observed their opportunities and challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities. The questions try to identify various social and cultural challenges that these women representatives were facing. They are given below in Table 5.

Table 5. Themes of social and cultural challenges of the elected women representatives

1. Information on proper training on duties
2. Administrative related awareness
3. Policies for corruption prevention and increasing transparency
4. Avoiding conflict between colleagues
5. How to co-ordinate tasks between institutions
6. How to communicate with different ward members
7. How to organize an event
8. How to practice stability
9. How to use time management in implementing projects
10. The process of getting funds from the state government and any challenges (if)
11. How to avoid conflicts between male and female leaders (if)
12. How to safeguard people, especially elderly and vulnerable groups
13. How to tackle gender stereotypes
14. How to encourage male members co-ordination
15. How to manage family and leadership roles
16. How to increase trust among society
17. How to increase family support for their leadership

Source: created by the author

It was as well crucial to identify the policies to prevent violence against women and the work of Jagratha Samiti (vigilant committee), police, and legal department support provided for the victims. The role of the women's commission was discussed as well. In order to identify the elected male representative's perception of women's leadership at the panchayat, the author has conducted face-to-face interviews with 15 male leaders from different panchayats from the Idukki district. They were presidents/vice-presidents or ward members. Identifying their views and the idea of having more women in leadership was essential for this research; thus, the author has conducted semi-structured interviews and discussions on topics such as in Table 6.

Table 6. Categories of the elected male representatives' perception of women's political leadership

1.	The importance of gender equality in the political sphere
2.	How men can involve in several ways to promote women in politics
3.	Importance of educating and providing sufficient consultations to the local community in encouraging women's leadership more
4.	Opinion on the ability of women representatives in preparing, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies in their panchayat
5.	Opinion on women representative's ability to regulate and be accountable for financial assistance at various panchayat programs
6.	The leadership of women representatives in conducting special discussions or awareness programs organized at the panchayat on women and girls' protection
7.	The level of discrimination faced by women leaders at the local self-government activities or party level leadership
8.	Discussing the role of women representative's empathy, sincerity, and compassion approach compared to a male counterpart in their developmental actions
9.	Opinion on the importance of previous political experience for women
10.	Analyzing the importance of family support, especially husband's support for a woman leader

Source: created by the author

Participant sample: Elected women leaders at the panchayat

In order to identify various leadership traits of elected women representatives at the panchayat and social and cultural challenges of the elected women representatives at the panchayat, this study conducted interviews with elected women representatives from 25 different panchayats at Idukki district of Kerala state in India. Table 7 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the elected women presidents who participated in this research.

Table 7. Socio-demographic characteristics of the female respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Category	Total number of samples
Gender	Female	25
Age	20 to 30	2
	31 to 40	2
	41 to 50	10
	51 to 60	10
	61 to 70	1
Educational qualification	Up to high school (10 years of schooling)	7
	Up to higher secondary school (12	10

	years of schooling) Bachelor's degree (15 years of schooling) Master's degree (17 years of schooling) Vocational/Professional training (14 years of schooling)	5 1 3
Job experience	Employed (teachers – 5, social workers – 3, business owner – 1, agriculture – 3) Un-employed (housewife)	12 13
Family	Married Un-married Married with children Widow	24 1 24 0
Participation in Kudumbashree (SHG)	No experience 1 to 5 years 6 to 10 years Above 11 years	3 2 10 10
Any political party affiliation	Yes No	25 0
Religious group affiliation	Yes No	18 7
Other organizational leadership	Yes No	22 3

Source: created by the author

Participant sample: Elected male leaders at the panchayat

In order to identify the elected male representative's perception of women's leadership trait at the panchayat, this study interviewed 15 elected male representatives who were presidents/vice presidents/ward members of different panchayats Idukki from the Kerala state in India. The interview was face-to-face. All participants were elected officials in local self-government institutions from 2015 to October 2020.

Table 8 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of elected male respondents who participated in this research.

Table 8. Socio-demographic characteristics of the male respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Category	Total number of the samples
Gender	Male	15
Age	Under 30 years old 30–39 years old 40–49 years old	0 3 10

	50–59 years old	2
	60–69 years old	0
	70–79 years old	0
Education	Up to high school	9
	Secondary school diploma	4
	University education	2
	Professional training	0
Family status	Married	13
	Unmarried	2
	Widow	0
Employment	Employed	15
	Agriculture	9
	Laborer	3
	Social worker	1
	Business owner	2
	Unemployed	0
	Pensioner	0
	Other	0
Any political party affiliation	Yes	14
	No	1
Religious group affiliation	Yes	10
	No	5
Other organizational leadership	Yes	11
	No	4

Source: created by the author

2.2. Data analysis

For the empirical analysis of objectives 2 and 3, i.e., to identify the elected women representative's leadership traits and analyze how it strengthens their political leadership at the panchayat and analyze social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership at the panchayat, the author has conducted interviews with 25 elected women panchayat presidents. In total, 23 interviews were face to face, and two were via phone. All the participants were elected officials in the local self-government institutions from 2015 to October, 2020. For the empirical study, in order to achieve objective 4, i.e., to analyze men's perceptions on women's political leadership at the panchayat, the author has interviewed 15 male elected representatives at the panchayat from the Idukki district in Kerala.

In order to identify objective 2 and 3, i.e., women leaders' opinion about political leadership at the panchayats, its characteristics, identifying various challenges and opportunities, the author has categorized the questions in such a way that they would provide an in-depth analysis about women's political background, how many times they were participating in the election process, their family background as a political activist, their individual experience as political activist, the way leaders observe their leadership capacity before and after coming into the

panchayat leader role, their understanding about the Panchayati Raj Institution policy and its importance on woman's role in politics as well as their additional responsibilities as a woman leader, various challenges a woman leader has to face in the local self-government, etc. Various inequalities that they are facing in their day-to-day life activities at the local self-government were discussed as well.

Moreover, the author was discussing the features related to various opportunities to express at the panchayat as a woman leader, which included their ability in decision-making, allocation of funding to various developmental activities at the panchayat, their decision capacity of dividing finance to various wards in the panchayat, their efficiency in the allocation of funding to the overall development of the panchayat, their leadership or membership in other organizations, such as Kudumbashree, or any religious organizations, or any social or charity related organizations. The questions on their experience when dealing with political leaders at the higher level when it comes to certain terms and agreements or arrangements that has to be made in order to avoid any form of unnecessary verbal arguments were as well included in the discussions. Then, in order to identify their ability to understand various regulations, there were discussed various trainings provided by KILA and how these trainings are actually helping them to understand their responsibilities and duties at the local self-government.

Then, in order to find out the third objective on social and cultural challenges and opportunities of leadership at panchayat, women leaders were discussing their involvement in society as a citizen and as a leader who has the ability to change the society for the better. In this regard, the emotional intelligence of the elected woman representative were observed by various questions, which revealed the emotional intelligence capacity of women leaders, especially when it comes to the jagratha samiti activates, grama sabha at the panchayat, and in various wards, because in each panchayat, there are grama sabha meetings, in which people and leaders come together to discuss various developmental projects and opportunities they would like to implement in their panchayat within certain time. Thus, in order to identify various opportunities and listen to various requirements about the citizens in the certain ward, it is important for a leader to be very careful and emotionally intelligent in order to avoid any misunderstandings, listen to the citizens properly, understand their requirements carefully, and create and implement required policies to fulfill citizen's needs.

Then, in order to identify various supports and opportunities provided by the higher officials, such as political party leaders as well as others, it was important to identify the cooperation between other panchayats, other leaders, and party leaders' influence on a woman leader's panchayat responsibilities and duties. Because even if a woman is powerful, sometimes, the political party leaders may be influencing, pushing, or affecting their administrative ability, because these politicians may want to make certain changes following the party interest, and as a genuine transparent leader or as a person who does have the ability and responsibility to provide assistance equally to every citizens without any corruption, malpractice, favoring or considering any specific group of people or individuals. It is very important that a leader has to keep the attitude of integrity of equality. Thus, in order to provide this

kind of equal assistance to everyone, a leader must be strong enough; hence, it was important in this dissertation to identify if a woman leader faces any form of such pressure coming from any individuals or parties, or they were forced to do certain malpractices or corruption practices to favor any specific people in the society.

Moreover, in 2018, Idukki district was facing huge natural calamity; therefore, many people were seeking shelter home assistance, and at that time, women leaders were facing immense responsibilities, such as male leaders. In general, they may be required to travel during midnight to attend the telephone calls and save different people from losing their life, etc. At those times, the challenges faced by women leaders in terms of finance, support from higher authorities, support from other ward members and the staffs at panchayats as well as their own family members were required to be observed more carefully. Thus, in order to identify this important aspect, the author was asking various questions in relation to the support and assistance that these women leaders got during the time of natural calamity in 2018 and later collaboration given from the government side for panchayats. As part of the third objective, the author has discussed the duties of women leaders, no matter if it is day or night, especially during a natural calamity or emergency situations, etc.

Due to the PRI policy, since many women got the opportunity to be in the political leadership arena and have the roles of leaders with many potential leadership traits, it was as well important to discuss the opinion of these women, if they want to be in the elections next time, since they have learned various leadership traits and got practical experiences in their governance time in each panchayat. Because of such good, motivated leadership abilities, they are able to promote and motivate the younger generation to be able to understand the importance of women's political empowerment. Thus, these were the main questions that were asked women leaders in the panchayat in Idukki district of Kerala in order to identify objective 2 and objective 3.

When it comes to the fourth objective, which is to identify the men's perceptions on women's political leadership at the panchayat, the author has conducted an empirical study with 15 elected male representatives from the Idukki district of Kerala. These representatives were either panchayat president or vice president or ward members in their respective panchayat. Some of them were having much more experience in the political leadership and membership in various parties, then the women leaders who were participating in this dissertation. Therefore, in order to identify the men's perspective on women's political leadership at the Panchayati Raj Institutions, it was necessary to find out various elected male representatives opinion about women's leadership in the respective local self-government institutions. Such research is quite new in its subject's specificity and relevant, trying to identify various leadership traits and how the elected male members are observing and agreeing or sometimes disagreeing with the woman political leadership. In order to identify these specific objectives, the author had asked many questions in relation to various aspects of the panchayat administration and related government policies, which are implemented or planning to be implemented in various wards in each panchayat and how the men leaders observe

the way of implementation of these policies under the leadership of women leaders in the area.

Moreover, as gender mainstreaming has been embraced nationally and internationally, it was necessary to identify the idea of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the political sphere through the PRI policy in the panchayat and how satisfied and happy the men leaders are, especially when they see more women in their panchayat leadership. Therefore, the male elected representatives' opinion on how they are actually embracing women's political leadership and their qualities as leaders in their panchayat was observed through discussion with men. Furthermore, the questions to male representative who have better experiences in the political sphere than women leaders and how these men are able to help and support women in the political sector, especially at the local self-government, are discussed in the empirical study.

In order to find out the designing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of various policies in a panchayat, all leaders, no matter if they are newcomers or having better experience in politics than women, are equally required being in the coordination. Hence, it was important to identify the perspective of male members on women's political administration and their skill at implementing various policies and projects at the panchayat, because sometimes, in some panchayats, a woman who may not be having sufficient experience or expertise in the political sphere as a man, may be the head of the projects, and this woman needs to make sure about various policies and implementation strategies, and sometimes, other men leaders may not be happy to listen or agree with her due to their patriarchal mentality or other influences, such as party level pressure.

Therefore, in order to find out if the male members are happy to coordinate with women leaders, to fulfill various strategies at their panchayat, the questions related to the responsibility, project, and development strategies in their panchayats were identified as well. It helped to find out if the male members are helping women leaders, and the reflections on the activities of men to support women at panchayat were observed. The discussions about various funding and allocation of various project finances in various wards in a panchayat were giving an output on the men leaders views on women leaders transparency, administration, and integrity level of their leadership. Then, the discussions about various awareness programs organized by the men club or various cultural or social organizations on women's participation in the politics were discussed during such discussions with the male elected representatives. The author tried to find out various incidences of encouragement provided by the men in a society for the women leaders. Moreover, the discussions about various strategies, which have to be implemented in the society in order to prevent violence against women and girls and increase the accessibility of equal justice to everyone in the society and prevent corrupt practices etc. were evaluated Men's perspective on women leaders coordination to prevent violence against women or provide justice equally to everyone or coordinate police, fire force, and other departments, such as water authority, etc., in panchayats in Idukki were observed, because during a natural calamity scenario, these women leaders are always required to work for protecting their citizens without any delay and need to

cooperate with men. Thus, the question related to women leaders' abilities in managing all responsibilities was reviewed as well.

Moreover, the opinions on male elected representatives or women leaders that are facing any form of discrimination or sexism in their local self-government leadership, especially when women leaders do not have any leadership experience, were discussed with male leaders to find out any form of gender barriers that women leaders face and how these men leaders try to prevent such sexism. Moreover, sometimes, it seems that women leaders are categorized as very emotional and strict and may not have diplomacy as men leaders. Thus, the discussions of these forms of sexism and discrimination were a part of the study and revealed how men leaders perceive these elected women representatives' emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, since the district is prone to landslide or natural calamities; thus, male and female leaders may need to travel together for a long distance even during night or day. The male representatives were discussing the importance of family support that a woman leader needs to have more than a men leader. Women need to fulfill various duties and responsibilities; they need to be a caring mother, daughter, and wife at the same time, when they have to fulfill the responsibilities at their panchayat. It was discussed with the male leaders about the male leaders' perspective on how women leaders are able to fulfill their task and how does these immense responsibilities are coming as a cultural or social challenge for a woman to be a political leader.

Then, the male leaders were discussing the perception from the society against a woman if she would like to be a candidate, but in case if she does not win the election, she may face various forms of cyber bullying or verbal abuse or any form or harassment. Thus, male leaders were giving their opinion that the government and society have the responsibility to tackle these challenges in the coming years, because if such incidences are happening, then another woman who may be planning to come to the political arena or political leadership will be reluctant and would not want to come to the political sphere by fearing such kind of harassment and personal abuse. Therefore, by discussing various above-mentioned themes, the author has tried to find out the men's perspective on women's political leadership and traits in the panchayat through the PRI policy.

For the analysis, from here on, the researcher uses letters as shown below to acknowledge respondents:

1. District Idukki as I
2. A woman president from the Idukki district will be IP1, IP2, IP3,.. IP25.
3. Years of experience in politics – P (e.g., P5/P10/915, etc.)
4. The experience in Kudumbashree (K years of experience)
5. Year of the interview

For example, a woman president who is from the Idukki district with four years of experience in political participation and five years of Kudumbashree membership, and the year of the interview is 2019 will be identified as IP1, P4, K5, 2019.

For the analysis, from here on, the researcher uses letters as shown below to acknowledge the elected male leader respondent who participated in this empirical study as follows:

- District Idukki as I
- Male respondents as M; hence, it will be M1, M2, M3, M4,.. M15
- Then, the experience in political career is P (e.g., P5/P10/915, etc.)
- Year of interview

For example, a male president who is from Idukki district with 20 years of experience in political career, and the interview was collected in 2019 will be denoted as I, M1, P20, 2019.

By analyzing the research objective, such as the importance of PRI policy through document analysis and then finding out the other three objectives, such as to identify various leadership traits of elected women representatives at the panchayat, the social and cultural challenges for elected women representatives at the panchayat, and the elected male representative's perception of women's leadership traits at the panchayat, this research should identify the main aim of the dissertation, i.e., to find out whether women's political empowerment can be achieved through their political leadership as shown in Figure 8.

Panchayati Raj Institutions act → Womens leadership at the Local Self Government → Womens political empowerment

Figure 8. The accomplishment of women's political empowerment

Source: created by the author

2.3. The ethical aspect of the research

The principle of confidentiality ensures that personal data and other private information is not disclosed; therefore, the names of the subjects are not published in the study, and surnames of the subjects are replaced by codes. The principle of fairness ensures that the research has been conducted in good faith, using valid measures, in accordance with scientific research, the methodological requirements for scientific research. In this research, the author had 40 participants in total as the interviewees, i.e., 25 women leaders and 15 male leaders. In order to identify their perspective on women's political leadership and various traits at the local self-government leadership, it was important to conduct the empirical study. Therefore, the author was visiting various panchayat in the Idukki district to meet female and male leaders in Kerala state. By visiting them, the author was having an opportunity to sit with them for about one to four hours. During this time, the author was able to identify their activities at the panchayat governance, which includes administrative

skills to organize various events at the panchayat. During this time, the author was able to observe various challenges of the elected female and male representatives to fulfill their tasks at the panchayat as leaders.

During the interview time, many people were visiting the president and were requesting for various help and assistance, which may have been in relation to their daily life, job, or their personal life. Sometimes, the complaints against domestic violence and many other important matters associated with citizens' safety that has to be amended and assisted from the panchayat administration side were discussed. Therefore, during this research, in order to keep the privacy of the research participants, a consent was written by the participants at the beginning, before the interview, and it was explained that the details shared with them will be used for the dissertation purposes, and their privacy will be kept. In most cases, the interviewees allowed to write down the answers rather than recording their voices. There were no video recordings of the interviewees. Hence, in order to keep the anonymity of the participants in this dissertation, the author has given specific codes for each participant. In that way, it was possible to keep the confidentiality and the anonymity of women and men representatives. There is no conflict of interest in this research, since the research is actually trying to identify various leadership traits, which are associated with women leaders and men leaders who are elected in the panchayats. The overall communication with the research participant was followed with transparency and honesty, and especially, since the communication was in Malayalam language, the author was able to explain and discuss many details with the participants, and sometimes, the author had to use the help of the driver to translate, because in between, some leaders were talking in Tamil language as well.

There is no biased information collected in the empirical study, and all the reports are actually obtained directly from the participants in this research. The women and men leaders at panchayats were given in depth observations on their day-to-day life as leaders in the local self-government.

2.4. Limitation of the study

- Sample size: the number of the analysis units that were used in this study is focused on the main research problem. Therefore, the sample size is limited.
- Lack of prior research on the topic: not many studies focus on PRI policy's importance in women's political participation. However, the study focusing on women's leadership capacity for political empowerment is still not found. Therefore, this study faces such limitation.
- Lack of accessibility to reach potential interviewees: in this study, the author took the Idukki district from Kerala for the case study, since it was accessible and covered the district's planned period. In other districts, the author could not collect data, because of the larger territory or higher number of panchayats or fewer panchayats and reachability (as in Wayanad district). It might be a limitation.
- Lack of sufficient time for the interview: in this study, the interview lasted up to 4 hours. Sometimes, the author had to be in the panchayat with interviewees, because the respondents were active in their panchayat duties.

It was not easy to get their appointment as leaders were always busy with their official duties, even on weekends.

- The difference in study results: when it comes to the study findings, there may be differences in political leadership, social and cultural challenges of women leaders, and perspective on men on women's political empowerment in other districts in Kerala than Idukki district, since other socio-demographic differences can be different in each district.

In conclusion, in this chapter, the author has explained a methodology that was used in the dissertation, i.e., a qualitative study to determine the research objectives. Moreover, it has developed strategies to find out the importance of using qualitative document analysis to find out the role of panchayat raj institutions policy in women's political empowerment, the details of empirical study, socio-demographic characteristics of the female and male respondents that participated in this research in the case study from Idukki district of Kerala state in India.

CHAPTER 3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this chapter, the author will be analyzing women's empowerment in India and the importance of Panchayati Raj Institutions policies implementation to increase women's political leadership at the local self-governments in Indian states. It as well provides details on the case study on women's political participation in Kerala's state, elaborating on Kerala's historical movements for women's rights and active participation in politics. It as well identifies the significance of PRI policy in the state of Kerala. It shows the results of the leadership of women in panchayats in Kerala and their political empowerment. The chapter as well shows various social and cultural challenges that the elected women representatives face during their panchayat leadership. The chapter reveals men's perspective, specifically, elected male representative's opinion and approach towards women's political empowerment that derived from the empirical study.

3.1. Women empowerment in India through Panchayati Raj Institutions

India is one of the world's largest countries geographically with 28 states and eight union territories. The political structure that India adopted four decades ago is now fragile, and India has become a quasi-federal democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government. The federal legislative branch consists of the President, a Council of States, and a House of the People (commonly known as the Lok Sabha). The multi-party structure is focused on the political platforms for federal, state, or regional elections in India. The parties are registered with the Election Commission of India, and the Commission decides on the party status. However, women's political participation in the Indian constitutes is far less.

According to Singh (2017), female politicians tend to be committed party leaders. Various women's issues are discussed seeking to include them in their party manifestos, and it has been found that women's parliamentary leaders raise gender-specific issues and general matters. Female lawmakers serve as representatives of women's issues and matters of public concern. Singh (2003) considers that female politicians are united on women's issues, irrespective of political fraction. There is evidence that Indian female politicians care about educating children that are living in their constituencies. Most of them even had projects that aimed to improve education. However, this research did not discuss whether female politicians spend more on education than male politicians or whether such educational investments increased educational achievements.

Tong (2012) identifies that woman have a legitimate argument that beyond legislating, women's cause of gender equity has been overlooked. One explanation for this failure is that women's cause is put in men's hands, a male-dominated society, and male opinion in political and administrative circles. The lack of representation made women the focus rather than the topic of gender justice. The failure of women in legislatures followed the adoption of quotas in the Nordic countries, in which women politicians used it to enforce quotas in their respective political parties. It is important to remember that the Nordic country's legislation

never imposed quotas. Mathew (2003) says that in Kerala, the state's economic development is susceptible to political fluctuations: the upswings correspond to the left-wing governments. Williams and Thampi (2013) identify the lack of political will, coalition, political compulsions, sectarian biases, and constant bureaucratic obstacles in the way of successful decentralization. There was disappointment that even the left did not effectively use their immense political resources and organization to unite the vast masses behind the decentralization dream. The danger of Casteism and Communalism, a vital topic taken up by the Congress, was casteism and communalism on the socio-political structure. Kerala heralded the new socio-political cycle and Caste Systems of caste and society-oriented organizations and movements. Although these movements were subsumed within the Northern Kerala national movement, they dominated in Southern Kerala's political life. Up to date, the North-South division has persisted through the relative power of caste through socio-political history. The socialists were primarily active in numerous campaigns of social reform and the process of secularization. Both of these organizations were not a mere universalizing step to prepare Dalit women for specific strategizing strategies, but a concerted attempt to help them achieve livelihoods.

Kishor and Gupta (2009) state that the modern India is trying to prioritize women empowerment, and the participation in public life is considered an essential indicator of empowerment. However, numerous factors, such as caste, religion, illiteracy, and economic backwardness, often determine the extent of participation and constraints of development. An underlying change in basic assumptions creates what, when, and how in terms of women's empowerment. The Government of India's 2016 National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2019) offers demographic, wellness, and diet data for India and each state/union territory. Violence is one of the inhibiting factors for women's mental, physical, and emotional growth. Most women face violence from their spouses, especially during pregnancy. The aspect of spousal abuse had significantly reduced over the years, as it was 37.2% during the period of 2005–2006. Another essential element of land and asset ownership is that although there is no information accessible for the 2005–2006 period, the information about 38.4 percent for the 2015–2016 period is adequate. The last aspect concerns the wages and earnings that they acquired in cash during the previous year and shows a declining trend from 28.6% in 2005–2006 to 24.6% in 2015–2016. The World Economic Forum first introduced the 2006 Global Gender Gap Index as a framework for capturing gender-based disparities and tracking their progress over time.

According to the World Economic Forum (2014) study, India's financial involvement was ranked in 134 position worldwide. It as well demonstrates that the present policies are inadequate for women's financial independence and need more reliable strategy frameworks. However, India's political empowerment rating shows that India's general political empowerment scores a more durable. It has been accomplished through various laws, providing females with political empowerment and involvement. However, this stronger political empowerment position has not given females many possibilities in parliament and ministerial roles. The other two factors, such as females in parliament, rank India at 111 and 107 for females in

official positions. It demonstrates that political empowerment did little to acquire roles and other entitlements. Skalnik (2003) states that "authority is the right to act and make laws; power is understood as an ability to enforce obedience"; thus, right stands against coercion, recognized ability against force, or the threat of it. In this case, women do have the challenges of acquiring power as equal as a man. Kabeer (1994) extends this though by saying that "social rules, norms, values, and practices play a critical role in concealing the reality and pervasiveness of male dominance and defusing gender conflict". Therefore, it is necessary to understand and study government and individual roles in encouraging women's development in all spheres and the political realm.

Dahlerup (1988) believes that quota systems are essential in encouraging political sector. Gender quotas allow men and women to compete for elected offices and the prospect of electorate in deciding either a man or a woman should be elected to the political office. Fox (1992) identifies that political participation includes the right to vote, the right to contest, the right to the candidate, and their role as women campaigners, legislative assembly members. Women's political autonomy involves equal right to citizenship and the ability to enter traditional power centers. Eagly et al. (2020) believe it is essential to identify women in society. Thus, they say that public space must be more hospitable to women, ethnic minorities, and other groups without emptying them of content and destroying the foundations of democratic politics. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2021 March 31) results identify that India is in 140th place worldwide, a relatively lower position on gender equality; however, in 2006, it was in the 98th position.
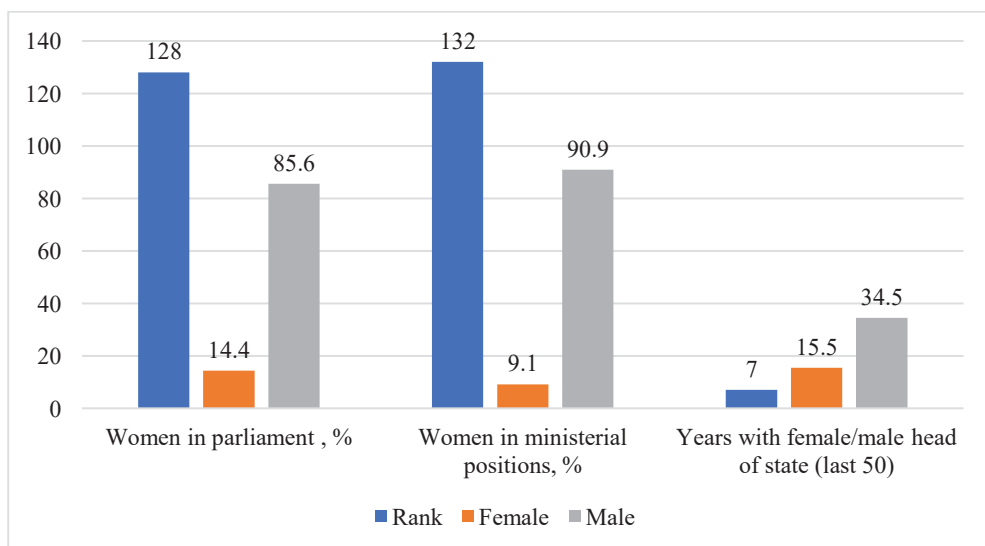
Figure 9. Political empowerment of women in India, Global ranking, 2021

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India, p. 217

Figure 9 shows the political empowerment of women in India-Global ranking 2021. When it comes to the representation of women in parliament, women in ministerial positions, it shows a significant lack of women's representation in the parliament and ministerial position over the years and the lower ranking of the country at the global level. When reviewing the representation of woman in parliament, it shows that when it comes to the representation, there is only a representation of 14.4 regarding women in the parliament, whereas with the representation of men, it shows a significantly higher percentage of 85.6, which shows the significant male domination, when it comes to the context of parliamentarian positions. This can be attributed to the lack of representation given to the woman in the context at the national level in the parliamentarian positions and the lack of success rates for women parliamentarians due to the mindset, especially the patriarchal outlook of the Indian society. Thus, regarding the parliamentarian position and the representation at the global level, the country does not have a significant ranking as it stood at 128th position in the overall ranking category. The second aspect that can be seen is women in the ministerial positions.

Unlike the woman in parliament, this as well shows significant drawbacks, as there is only 9.1 representation for women in ministerial positions, which is lower than the percentage of woman in parliament and higher than the representation for males in the ministerial positions, which have the representation of 90.9 percentage, which shows the significant domination when it comes to holding the office by the male representatives. This as well can be attributed to the political party affiliations and the predominance given to the male candidates, and the percentages by the political parties, which men are still dominating. Thus, due to this, the country does not have a significant ranking at the global level when it comes to woman in ministerial positions as it is in 132nd position in the overall ranking. The only distinction regarding this is the years with the female or male head of the states for the last 50 years as the representation of males or females and the difference in the percentages not that much significantly glaring as the other two aspects, such as the female representation, which is 15.5, and the male representation, which is 34.5.

This can be attributed to various state scenarios, in which due to various social-cultural aspects, woman were able to occupy and hold some of the significant head of the state positions, especially in the southern part of India due to the egalitarian nature of the society and the facilitation given by the male counterparts. Thus, due to these factors, regarding the aspect of female or male heads of the states, the country has a significant ranking at 7th position in the overall ranking. Figure 9 shows that even though there is a higher representation of women at the state level, but when it comes to the national level, regarding the representation as ministers or at the parliamentarian positions, there is a significant lack of women's representation. Another significant aspect of the progressive mentality regarding woman representation is implementing the Panchayati Raj Act, which provides educational mechanisms to the society for gender equality.

Therefore, the author wanted to identify the background of women's political empowerment in India and the importance of PRI policy.

3.1.1. An overview of political empowerment of women in India

India has a federal parliamentary democracy with the President as the head of the state and supreme commander of military forces. India's democratic political system consists of a national government with a bicameral legislature, namely the Rajya Sabha (council of states), the upper house, and the more powerful Lok Sabha (house of the people). Looking at the examples of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, all three nations offered many opportunities for women to represent the head of state in a remarkable way as any other developed country. Other essential steps required for the empowerment of females are the right conditions and timing of a job. Unlike men, women must perform their duties in the employment sector, take care of the household, and take care of children and their upbringing. Therefore, adequate job setting regulations, including fair pay and other maternity and childcare advantages, can provide females with work-related emancipation. Another important metric is the approachability to political empowerment. It has been done by offering the reservation and other statutory advantages and orienting and teaching the electorate and the need for and importance of gender relations and their consequences in culture and the nation's perception of the global arena. Thus, a gender-equitable political context can provide a worldwide attitude to its political structure (OECD, 2017a). In India, the debates and discussions on participatory politics have been discussed in politics, especially in feminist perspectives; thus, women's notion of empowerment in various sectors has been considered and sought legitimately (Philip, 1985).

Until the 19th decade, the research and debates on women's freedoms and gender equality began in the Indian political arena. By the 1980s, researchers and social activists began to challenge women's political participation. Consequently, women's political empowerment became a significant discussion and an essential element of evolutionary evaluation in culture. Political participation involves the freedom to register, the right to compete, a candidate, and their position as female campaigners and legislative assembly members. There are numerous ideas on female inclusion. According to Malhotra et al. (2002), empowerment improves multiple people and organizations' resources and capacities to participate, impact, and retain. Batliwala (2007) describes women's empowerment in relation to how children obtain higher control over the content and mental assets and contest the ideology of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination against females in all the organizations and constructions of culture. Andersen and Siim (2004) describe the development as the method of awareness-building and capacity-building. As Nussbaum (1999) points out, any government can tackle the issues to promote women's political participation through significant policy measures. Even if there are capable women, but they do not have an opportunity to use nation-building skills, the governance level does not support womanhood. Thus, in order to enhance such opportunities for women, it is necessary to implement various projects and schemes for women at local, national, and international levels. That is why it is essential to accept the change, which is important to eradicate subordination, inequality, and coercive power relations as well as to develop positive outcomes. This transformation of women in the political sphere is possible through various governmental programs,

depending on the social structure requirements.

Regarding gender equality and woman empowerment, it must be noted that it has significant roots in India's historical aspects. Woman got a significant and respected position in the society and families until the codification of the book by Manu, known as Manusmriti, which can be seen as the basic facilitation for all the evils, rather than the eradication of those in the Indian society. It must be noted that until that time, a woman enjoyed a respectable position in this society and family (it is a contested point. Even classifying the pre-and post-Vedic period, it could be seen that women enjoy respectable positions and hold significant responsibilities. The biggest distinction between the Vedic and post-Vedic periods was that the Vedic period was more of a matriarchal system.

In contrast, the post-Vedic got oriented towards a patriarchal system. Even though, unlike the previous system, both the Vedic and post-Vedic systems provided women equality, women enjoyed a significant respectable position in society as they possessed independence and rights and had access to education and imparting knowledge. Regarding personal life, they as well have significant autonomy, as they have the right to choose their partner in marriage and can denounce a marriage and remarry. Regarding the position of the widows, they have the possibility and independence to get remarried. However, with the codification of Manusmriti in the post-Vedic times, women lost their rights regarding equality. They were deprived of their rights to inherit property, the right to choose their partners, and the right to have an education and learn. Thus, over time, Manusmriti penetrated deep into the minds and hearts of Indian society, thereby trying to make a significant distinction regarding men and women, creating a position in which it leads to the enslavement of women by men (Dutta, Bhakta, 2017). This situation worsened, especially after the 7th century when Islamic invasion of the Middle East started deepening on the Indian subcontinent, bringing other social evils, such as polygamy, the purdah system, and other social malpractices.

One of the significant developments in Indian society was the arrival of the British rule in India. The British together with the progressive minds of the Indian society at that time, such as Rajaram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, etc., tried to educate the society regarding the need for gender equality and eradicate social evils from the society. Due to their democratic mechanisms and progressive outlook that tried to eradicate the social evils that were propagated in Indian society, e.g., child marriage, polygamy, etc., other significant contributors who tried to enhance the woman's situation were Jyotiba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. They dedicated their lives to the overall development of women and other deprived sections of society. One of the most visionary persons who dedicated his life to gender equality and the country's progressive development was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. One of the significant aspects regarding Ambedkar's idea was that it was mostly aligned with the ideas of global feminist movement, which tries to promote equality of women in the matters of education as well as the matters of property and their political empowerment, thereby trying to ensure the overall gender equality between men and women. Regarding the plight of women in India, Ambedkar was critical that Manusmriti was the root cause and evil of all the inequality that perpetrated towards women in India

(Kavitakait, 2013, as cited in Datta, 2019). Regarding the aspect of inequality perpetrated towards women, Ambedkar believed that the ideas and teachings of Buddha could be taken as a good example for alleviating the grievances of women and providing gender equality and empowerment together with men in the society (Das, 2015).

Through such actions, there could be seen the reflection of ideas and principles of J.S Mill in the works and actions of Ambedkar. He tried to find an alignment between the aspect of caste and gender domination. He states that for the essential equality and well-being of the people, it is necessary to annihilate both the caste and the gender domination that are prevalent in Indian society. He finds this correlation through the mechanism of the caste system with domination prevailing in the society, especially at the village level, it is through such caste and its control mechanisms, the gender domination, and subjugation of woman occur in the Indian society. Ambedkar was vehemently vocal towards the submissive nature of the society, in which a woman was dictated by a man and was forced to live under male domination. Even though a person with this deep theoretical and empirical understanding of various aspects of Indian society, especially regarding the gender caste nexus, was often sidelined due to his deprived caste position. However, he was not ready to give up. He fought vehemently for eliminating the caste-gender nexus, which can be seen as the root cause of all the social evils in the society at that time in India, which to a great extent can be seen in its present reflection as well.

One of the significant aspects that distinguished Ambedkar from the rest of the political leaders of his time was that other political leaders insisted on political democracy. In contrast, he insisted on social democracy, through which equality will be established in the social structure that treats all human beings dignifiedly, facilitating political democracy in India. He stated that the facilitation of political democracy is social democracy, and through social democracy, political democracy will attain an egalitarian state in India. One of the significant achievements of Ambedkar regarding gender equality was the formulation of the Hindu Code Bill and its consequent amendments. As the country's first law minister with the introduction of the Hindu court/Code bill, it explicitly shows his determination towards eradicating gender inequality and caste-based domination in Indian society. It was a significant landmark in legislation, even though the British did various progressive measures in India for the eradication of various social evils; however, when it comes to the aspect of legal measures within the Hindu community, it was left alone by the British to the sole authority and discretion of the Hindu community to govern and envisage measures regarding themselves. One of the significant changes regarding this happened with the initiation of the Rao Committee of 1948.

Until then, there was no consensus on various aspects within the Hindu community regarding legislation and governance. With the intervention made by Ambedkar, it made some progressive changes in the Hindu Code Bill, which questions the evil practices of the caste-gender nexuses and tries to legalize measures in the Hindu Code Bill, which for the first time in the history of India allows women to have right to their property together with men, the right of inheritance, the right to divorce and the right to have equal property rights in the

family. Moreover, through this mechanism, it removes the evil of cost-based domination and caste-based biases within Hindu society. This was the stepping stone for various significant legislations in India on women's equality, including the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which led to the formulation of significant and meaningful legislations and gender equality and women empowerment in India. Therefore, when it comes to gender equality, the name of Ambedkar and his measures and mechanisms have been seen as a significant step in this regard, and it was standing ahead of time. Even though Mahatma Gandhi and other political leaders vocalized such measures, when it comes to the implementation aspect, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar installed such a vision in legal measures of the Indian penal system, thereby facilitating gender equality for women in India.

As mentioned, Ambedkar insisted on social democracy and its predominance over political democracy, because through the facilitation of social democracy, it will pave the way for political democracy. Regarding the aspect of political democracy, one of the significant aspects is related to the universal adult franchise. However, what concerns the aspect of adult franchise in the Indian context, even though the name states that the franchise is for all the adults in the country, but in the case of India, it did not facilitate universal adult franchise for woman or other depressed and minority groups. Thus, with his legislative assembly, he ensured that the universal adult franchise would be facilitated for all, including women and the deprived sections of society. Ambedkar's activism for women and gender equality did not just comply with or restricted the Hindu Code Bill or the universal adult franchise. He went far ahead as he was the first of the politicians in the Indian subcontinent, especially under the British administration, who fought and got vocal for the rights of the working woman. He argued that the rights of the working woman as well need to be taken into consideration. The government should develop some terms and measures that will facilitate the rights of the women who were conceived or having prenatal time, and insist that it is the government's responsibility or duty to facilitate such measures and bear some of its expenses. Due to such measures, the administration passed the legislation, which will facilitate the basic rights for people working in the mines and factories and the protection of woman and children and working women, which was implemented in 1938. Thus, with each of these measures and policy mechanisms, he challenged the very base caste division and hierarchical structure of the Indian society and its deep-rooted social structure, thereby trying to reform the society, according to the needs of modern times.

Moreover, in order to achieve and accomplish all the objectives mentioned above, Ambedkar carefully instilled the right to equality to all the sections of the society, including women, in the preamble of the constitution, thus making it illegal to facilitate the caste-based domination and gender inequality through the constitution. Thus, regarding women's empowerment, Ambedkar's idea has a great visionary impact on the overall reforms of the Indian society, without which the aspect of a woman and gender equality can still be a distant dream in the Indian society.

In the south Indian region, its history of matrilineal kinship shows that women

can attain education, property, power, etc. However, other essential aspects of women's social worth, especially regarding their empowerment in terms of domestic violence experience and their internalization of accepting any justification of violence, played a vital role in their reporting symptoms of health issues (Sudha et al., 2007). Moreover, Rocca et al. (2009) found that "women in south India who participated more actively in social groups, vocational training, or employment opportunities were more likely to experience domestic violence. They argue that efforts to empower women may have unintended negative consequences, such as domestic violence". It clearly shows the cultural barrier and stigma of women's gender equality and building block for their political leadership careers.

Figure 10 shows the representation of women in the Indian parliament, especially at Rajya Sabha or the council of states, which is the upper house of the Indian parliament, according to the Woman Members in Rajya Sabha. The period taken for this analysis is 67 years, from 1952 to 2019. It shows the development or progress of women in the Indian parliament at Raja Saba. This shows that when it comes to the representation of women in the Indian parliament at Rajya Sabha over 67 years, it did not demonstrate much progress in women representation, as there were 15 seats for women, which is 6.90 percentage in 1952.
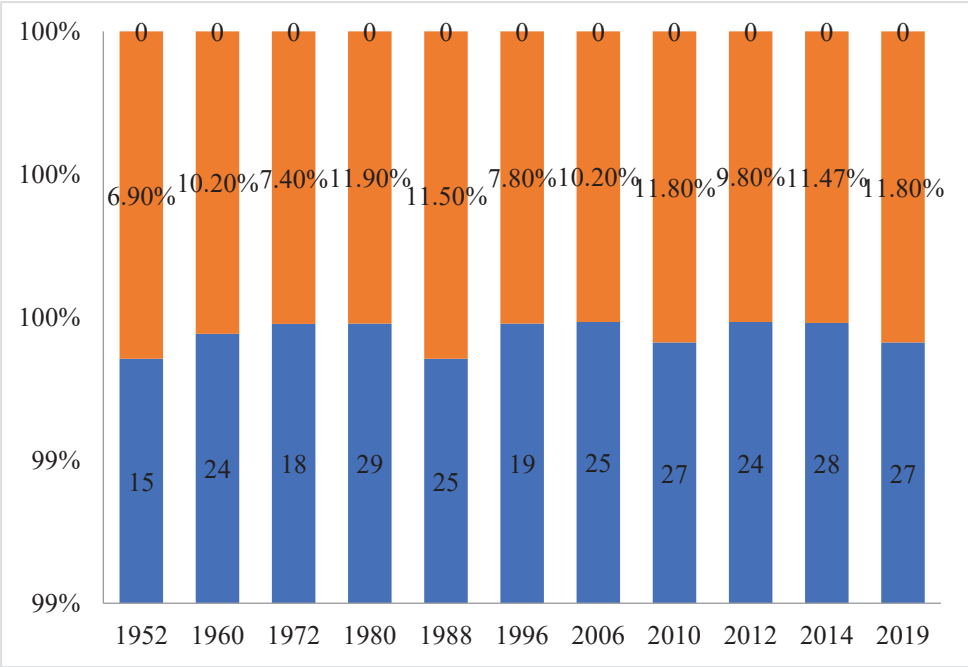

Figure 10. Women in Indian Parliament at Rajya Sabha (Council of States)

Source: Women Members in Rajya Sabha

In contrast, it only reached 27 seats or 11.80 percentage in 2019. This shows that over 67 years, an enhancement of 12 seats has been attributed to women in the Indian parliament at Rajya Sabha. The period that shows a significant downfall of

women's representation in the Indian parliament is 1996. The representation of women in the Rajya Sabha was only 19 seats. This can be attributed to the religious ideology of the government headed by the Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), which show significant constraints towards the gender parity. Moreover, within this classification, the period which shows a significant representation of women in the parliament in Rajya Sabha was during 1980. There was a significant representation of 29 seats for women, which can be attributed to the democratic ideals of the government headed by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Thus, it shows that women's representation as well depends on the political orientation of the governments that hold the administration. Moreover, it shows that it needs to have significant legal mechanisms that can provide significant development and representation of women in the parliament and at the national levels and local legislative bodies.

According to Sharma (2017), gender equality and inclusion have become the central elements of different government's strategic goals and plans. Such growth approaches face difficulties and criticism, since the commitments ceased to meet women's empowerment strategies. In the 1990s, the Beijing Conference substantially enhanced females' debating empowerment at multiple government stages. Gupta and Yesudian (2006) states that nowadays, India is attempting to prioritize women's empowerment and involvement in government lives, which is regarded as a significant empowerment measure. However, several factors, such as caste, religion, and economic backwardness, often determine participation and constraint development. According to Sandys (2005), significant technological progress in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh helps the social transformation and societal economic growth. However, there is still an absence of political parties and parliamentary officials' efforts to promote women's empowerment and dedication to women's preferences in India's parliament. Valentino et al. (2011) defend this concept and clarify that political participation relates to the behavior that has value or impact in influencing government action immediately, influencing public decision planning or execution, or indirectly influencing the choices.

In India, women's empowerment has been seen as the seventh goal of the Ninth Plan (Government of India, 9th Five Year Plan (Vol-1)), proposing the empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged groups, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other backward classes and minorities as agents of socio-economic change and development. The scholars, such as Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) and Wolak (2020), explain that it is apparent that anyone would profit from the enhanced self-confidence, the capacity to behave efficiently in the public sphere, the power to regulate one's revenue, the ability to prepare for the future. One significant gender inequality in the workplace is illustrated by the disparity in salary, as females are compensated less than males. However, both perform the same tasks.

There were many women in the early labor unions, as a select factory committee for women. However, they did not continue to develop.

The figure below shows female labor participation of rural and urban women in Kerala from 1993 to 2012, according to the Kerala-Gender World Bank group in
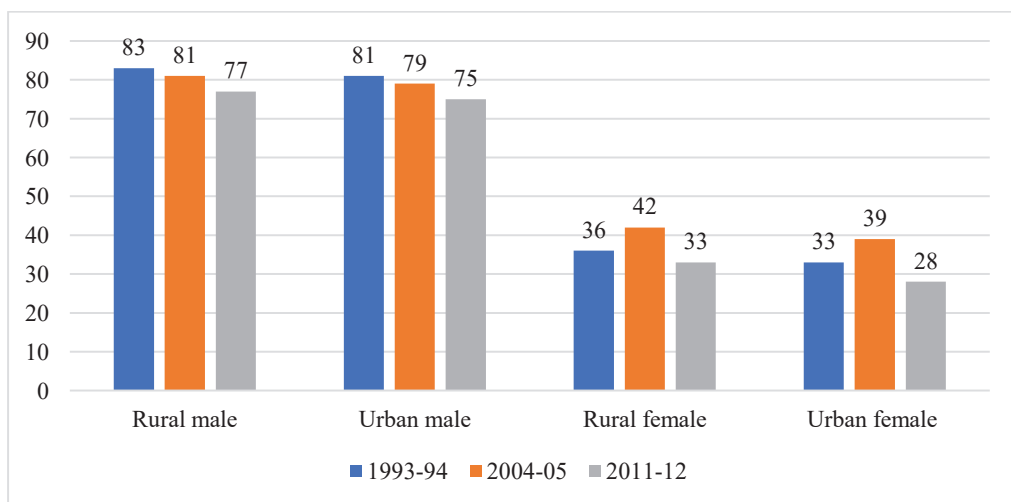
Figure 11. Female labor participation of rural and urban women in Kerala

Source: Kerala-Gender, World Bank Group, 2017

Looking at the statistics, it could be seen that when it comes to the labor representation and participation of both males and females, there is a significantly higher percentage when it comes to the representation of males in the labor participation in both rural and urban males. In contrast, rural and urban females have less or significant labor participation than rural and urban males, when it comes to the female labor participation. Over the years, the representation of the urban and rural male is from 70 to 80 percentage. In contrast, the rural and urban female representation falls from 30 to 40 percentage. This shows a huge gap, especially regarding the gender labor participation in Kerala from 1993 to 2012. Another significant aspect that can be noticed in the figure above is that over the period from 1993 to 2012, in all these time frames of 1993–1994, 2004–2005, 2011–2012, irrespective of gender, both male and female representation shows the diminishing trend over the three-time frames and reaches the lowest percentage in the timeframe of 2011–2012.

The figure mentioned above shows the changing trends of the labor participation in Kerala society. This can be evident as the representation of rural males was 83 percentage in 1993, whereas it got reduced to 81 percent in 2004 and further reduced to 77 percent in 2011. The urban male as well shows the same trend with 81 percentage in 1993, which was further reduced to 79 percent in 2004, and its lowest to 75 percentage in 2011. Regarding the rural female, even though it shows some difficulties, it finally reaches its lowest minimum in 2011, as it was 36 percent in 1993. In contrast, it got a slight increase of 42 percent in 2004 and further reduced to its lowest minimum of 33 percentage in 2011. The final category in this regard is the urban female, which shows a percentage of 33 percent in the welfare

development, and it got a slight enhancement to 39 percentage in 2004 and further reduction of 28 percentage in 2011.

Regarding this changing trend, several factors can be attributed to the changing societal patterns, especially the male representation in labor participation. Regarding the female urban and rural participation, as the middle period shows, there is some significant increase, which can be attributed to various rural employment guarantee schemes initiated by the national government and the respective state government, which facilitated such an enhancement over the middle period of 2004. Thus, it can be evident that this can be attributed to the largest outmigration of the urban and rural male population to the Middle East and other Gulf countries, searching for a livelihood. In contrast, a further reduction in 2011–2012 can be attributed to several factors, such as enhancing urban and rural women's education, which facilitated other means of livelihood. The outmigration of the rural and urban woman, which was facilitated by the family migration and the spouse and children abroad, can be a catalyst for reducing urban female labor participation.

Women's active political participation in Kerala, the communist ideology, women's contributions to the leftist party movement in the 1940s were enormous. This support would not have been possible without good courage, diligence, and practical ability. Nevertheless, other than praising them, there was no effort to get these women to the front part of the party leadership. However, it is not to be said that the number of women involved in social movements has declined nowadays. Still, many women struggle for the marginalized people in Kerala who are at the forefront of land, environmental harmony, pollution, and water. C.K. Janu, Mayilma, and Selena Prakkanam are known to society because of their popularity. However, many are not known due to the lack of support given to them.

However, Jeffrey (2016) clearly explains the gap between economic empowerment and political empowerment in his words "for women in Kerala, to go to school, read a newspaper, attend an office, draw a salary, or seek trained medical care are widely approved activities. To contest an election and give orders to men are not". Women do not directly influence political participation in Kerala, and thus, the status of women and power was less confirmed in the society. Since ancient times, drama and theatrical art forms have been prominent in Kerala. Such drama significantly influenced Kerala's female community, according to Erwér's (2003) views. The studies have found that social and cultural obstacles increase the disparity between men and women in Kerala to attain gender equality (Norris, Inglehart, 2001). In Kerala, social opportunities for enhancing women's public participation remain severely restricted (Kannan, 2005), and many reasons discourage women from participating in affirmative political action and prevent women's political decision-making (Chattopadhyay, Duflo, 2004).

Women's inclusion in the public bodies is seen as a symbol of expanded ability and essential for further strengthening of their freedoms. It was argued that without reservation, women could not occupy their rightful position in the political life. Therefore, Panchayati Raj Institution has given impetus to women's reservations at the local self-governance (Jafar, 2013). There is some doubt about whether this initiative has fallen short of its more ambitious targets. The lack of

understanding has made collective consciousness complex, depoliticized, and a political situation. However, such criticism of decentralization is more about unrealistic expectations than any abject process failure. Therefore, electing local governing bodies in Kerala provides useful insights on the reservations of women's political rights. Sen describes political equality as one of the instrumental freedoms leading directly or indirectly to the overall independence.

3.1.2. The Panchayati Raj Institutions' policy

The meaning of 'Panchayat' is a village council, and 'Raj' means Rule. Thus, Panchayati Raj means Rules in a Village Council. One of the significant features of recent decades is the broad participation of women in political and social spheres worldwide due to the implementation of gender schemes and programs of the governments and gender quotas, which enable them to participate in the political and social spheres. Mahatma Gandhi has advocated a decentralizing system in villages and the local level to empower women in India. This system is known as PRI. The government implemented this advocacy as an essential act by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 (Panchayati Raj).

Panchayati Raj Institution was established in India as a system of rural local self-governance. In India, the villages consist of Panchayat (council of five persons), and Panchayat's administration deals with various powers. Every state in India had accepted the policy; thus, the empowerment of Panchayat had become a vital division of the Indian states. The Panchayati Raj system is a three-tier structure based on the direct elections: village, intermediate, and district. Implementing the Panchayati Raj Institution with the 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution led to the decentralization of power. It encouraged more women to participate and gain leadership in the social and political area with the women's constitutional amendment's support (Varghese, 2019).

What concerns the provisions contained in Article 243 D of the Constitution, 1/3rd of seats of PRIs and 1/3rd of offices of chairperson at all levels of PRIs covered by Part 1X of the Constitution, which now are reserved for women; later, the Government of India has approved the change of implementing 50% reservation for women in PRIs from the existing 33% (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2011). This increased level of seat reservation encourages more women to be decision-makers from all levels. However, even if women get selected, an independent woman leader is a building block to run the administration smoothly. If she does not have more vital collaboration and accessibility to the government officials, the funding and projects approvement will get halted. Such a situation and the non-cooperative nature of patriarchal men in position impede the effective functioning of elected women representatives.

Since Kerala is well known for its developmental schemes, compared to all other Indian states, it is essential to observe Kerala's PRIs work. In 1994, Kerala Panchayati Raj Act and Kerala Municipality Act implemented different reforms at the local self-government level (LSG). Kerala Panchayati Raj system consists of the

3 tier system. The lower level is known as Grama Panchayat [2] (village level), the middle one is Block Panchayat, and the upper one is District Panchayat (LSGD, Government of Kerala).
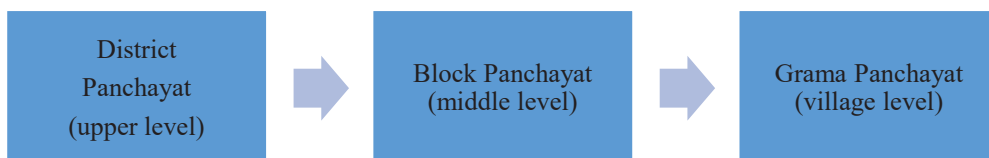
Figure 12. The three-tier system in the Panchayati Raj Institutions

Source: Panchayati Raj, Government of India

The 73rd and 74th Amendments' key features include a three-tier Panchayat system as given above; therefore, the duration of the Panchayat rule is five year term. A study by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2012) shows that women were motivated to participate in the political sphere through the reservation mechanism, which increases their confidence and awareness about the governance at the village Panchayat.

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[2] A Gram Panchayat (village council) or village panchayat is the only grassroots-level of Panchayati Raj formalized local self-governance system in India at the village or small-town level, and it has a president as its elected head.
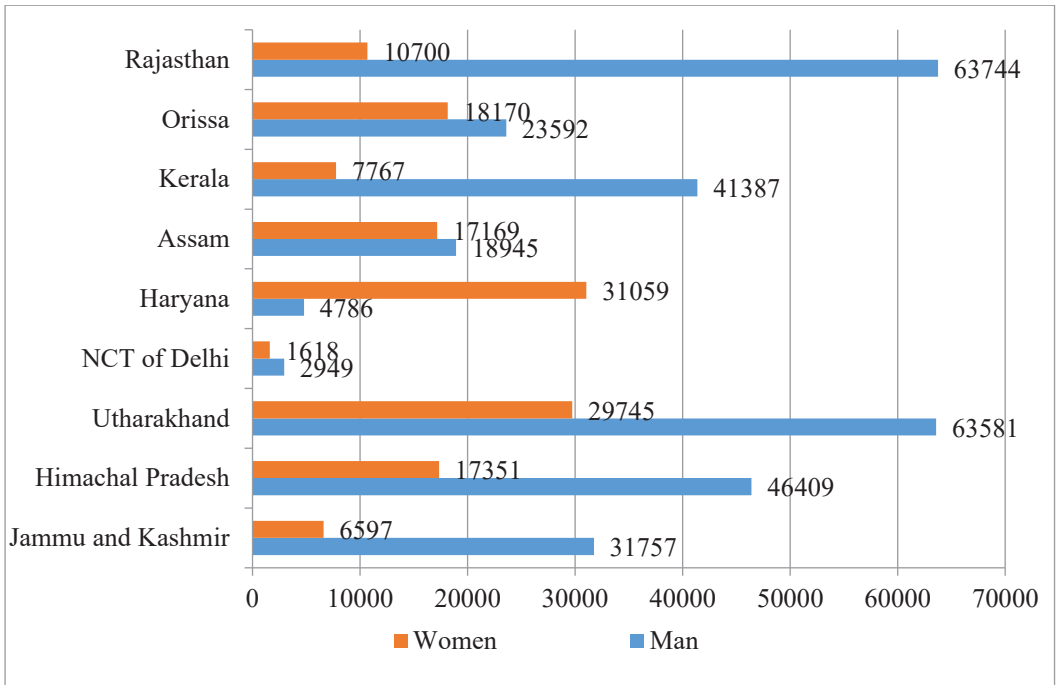
Figure 13. State-wise number of the candidates selected in the general election

Source: Election Commission of India

The above presented figure shows the state-wise number of the candidates selected for the general election 2009 in the selected Indian states, according to the Election Commission of India. According to the figure mentioned above, there can be seen a great amount of gender disparity in the representation and selection of candidates for the general election in 2009. These are especially evident in the northern States and the southern state of Kerala. However, when it comes to the greatest gender representation or candidates for the 2009 general election, it can be attributed to the eastern or northeastern states that show significant gender parity in women's representation and selection for the general election 2009. Regarding this, one of the significant representations is given by the state of Assam. There is almost equal representation in women and men's selection for the election, as there were 17,169 females selected for the general election in 2009 and 18,945 were men. Another significant state is Orissa, which has a woman representation of 18,170 along with 23,592 of men.

The states having a greater disparity are the northern states, such as Rajasthan, which hardly had a representation of 10,700 females, whereas the male representation includes 63,744. Another significant state in this regard can be seen in the state of Haryana, in which there is a female representation of 4,786, whereas there is a male representation of 31,059. However, one of the significant contradictions in this regard can be attributed to the national capital territory of Delhi, which has given almost equal representation to both males and females, as

there is a female representation of 1,618. In contrast, there is a male representation of 2,949. This can be attributed to the progressive mentality of the capital territory and the huge migrant diverse population, which shows its diverse outlook regarding gender parity and the political representation given by the political parties in this regard. One of the significant states with the highest disparity, which especially has significance for this study, is the state of Kerala, which, as the northern states, has a great gender disparity, especially in the representation of women and their selection for the general election of 2009, as there were only 7767 female representations. In contrast, the male representation is around 41,387. Thus, the figure mentioned above shows the candidates for 2009 and how the geographical location and its strategic importance can be attributed as a significant catalyst for selecting candidates for the election.

The term panchayat has derived from the Sanskrit word Pancha. The panchayat means the Village Self Governing Council that is consisting of five members. Over time, the name panchayat remained unchanged, though it expanded to include more than five members. Panchayat was the center of village life. The decisions of the panchayats were as the judgment of the villagers.

Nevertheless, during the British ruling, the village councils were destroyed. The local self-government institutions that were formed during the British rule functioned differently from the ancient panchayats. Old self-sufficient village panchayats were an integral part of the village life. Gandhi's entry into the Indian National Movement in 1915 was noteworthy. He proposed the need to revive India's political and cultural heritage. Gandhi made this point for the first time at a missionaries meeting held in Madras in February 1916. By that time, the British left India, and the old village system was ended. The panchayats were gone. Instead, there was an integrated and centralized administration of the provinces.

The constitution of panchayats, envisaged by Gandhiji, is enshrined in Article 40 of the fourth amendment as moral instruction. He proposed that "states organize Gram Panchayats and give them the necessary powers and functions to function as autonomous bodies". The Seventh Schedule of India's Constitution enshrined that states can legislate (Pal, 2004). Following this, by March 1954, 98,256 panchayats were established in various states and Union Territories. Out of 581,814 villages in the all-India level, 294,460 were brought under the Panchayat governing council's authority. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report, which became the road to decentralizing power, was adopted by the National Development Committee in 1958. The emergence of innovative village councils first happened in Rajasthan and then in other Indian states. After India signed the 73rd amendment Bill in April 1993, the Panchayati Raj [3]system was strengthened, and India's panchayats gained constitutional validity (Department of Panchayati Raj, Kerala).

India consists of 28 states and 8 Union Territories. In order to have an organized functioning of the State, due to its higher population, every State is

[3] The word "Panchayat" means assembly of five and raj means "rule". Traditionally, panchayats consisted of elderly and wise people chosen by the local community, who used to settle disputes between individuals and villages.

divided into districts and districts. These districts are divided into various villages. A village comprises of an administrative unit called a *Panchayat* (board of five individuals), having different duties to govern panchayat administration. Every State in India had embraced this strategy; thus, panchayat development became a significant part of the country. The Panchayati Raj Institution system is a three-tiered structure based on the direct elections in all three levels: village, intermediate, and district.

The Panchayati Raj Institution application with the 73rd article of the Indian Constitution resulted in the decentralization and greater involvement and management of females in the social and political arena, primarily because of the constitutional amendment reservation scheme. Due to the Panchayati Raj Institution act in a Local Self Government, there are 50–50 seats for men and women. It has created an equal platform for a woman to function as a decision-maker in the political administration. Though the dilemma of women's segregation in the political sphere is not new in the Indian political and social system, PRI's arrival has gained much attention. It has contributed to reorganizing gender concepts in the Indian political structure, making women's presence, and political participation. The Panchayati Raj Institution act resulted in females' conversion from being a mere housewife or pure receiver of government measures and programs to a custodian and holder of systems and practices at the political administration. Hence, from a small village to a significant administrative structure, consisting of 100 towns and even a district or corporate region.

This law is one of the Indian government's significant legislative changes. The Panchayati Raj Institution's implementation to make a three-tier scheme in the rural and metropolitan areas increased women's chance of getting elected equally to men. It as well paved the path for India's marginalized segment, particularly the SC/ST [4]group, to be the applicants through the ballot system and enhance their capacity to support residential and community development. It resulted in the assembly election and upliftment of disadvantaged segments, whereas around 2.91 million officials were appointed, approximately 21.4% from the SC and 10.2% from the ST group. Through this reservation system, women could stand as candidates for elections and increase the participation in democracy and politics. Without this law, it would not be feasible for females to be at the frontline of the Indian political process. Therefore, the Panchayati Raj Institution act is a significant law in the Indian Constitution. Females and marginalized sections of the nation are willing to empower themselves more democratically in the political sphere.

The Panchayati Raj Institution acts culturally and politically motivated by obtaining administrative and other social skills, contributing to the PRI's gender empowerment and potential well-being. The participation in the political process and movements allow them to form their images as females due to the long-term involvement and shared experience, undermined by gender oppression and

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[4] The Scheduled Caste (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are officially designated groups of people in India. The terms are recognized in the Constitution of India, and the groups are designated in one or the other category.

patriarchal structures in culture and families. However, females still experience significant disadvantages with the Panchayati Raj Institution initiation due to the socio-cultural effect of sexual attribution, which mostly prevents females from holding significant political opinions. Another vital element is females' cultural attitude, as most Hindu religious communities are patriarchal and masculine, which forbids women's economic and political empowerment. Most females consider it hard to resist the deeply embedded socio-family convictions, religious structure, and strict practices, limiting women's freedom.

3.1.3. Women's political leadership in the local self-government: A case of Kerala

Husu et al. (2010) say that leaders rely increasingly on the style differences to create and emphasize an impression of maneuverability. The image remains an important political fact, even if the maneuverability is not. Therefore, the concrete outcomes are not a considerable influence on continued incumbency or public resilience or satisfaction. However, in extreme cases of inflexibility or obtuseness, it is possible. The affective reaction of political groups in unique circumstances is what typically counts. In Tucker's (1977) opinion, leadership is not something one can acquire through hard work and preparation. It is a gift offered to certain persons in conjunction with nature and life circumstances. Thus, while most political communities never needed more creative leadership than they do now, the phenomenon remains a rare one, fortuitous in appearance, and usually a stroke of luck for the community that gets it. Experience, while necessary to allow creativity to show itself, is no guarantee. Inner stability, the freedom from self-absorption that enables a leader to keep his/her mind sensitively to what is happening beyond and empathize with other's emotions that make up the political culture is a requirement for incredibly creative leadership, if not a necessity.

Drezner (2020) argues that power must be relevant to people's valued things, and in this study, it could be seen that power is always associated with males rather than females. Hence, the voice of a female in a society is neglected. Hartley (2010) identifies power and leadership as the ability to cause other people to adjust their behavior following communicated behavior patterns. A leader is a very different, very circumscribed but potentially the most successful form of powerholder, measured by the degree of ultimately achieved expected real change. Burns (1978) views leadership as one of the earth's most noticed and least understood phenomena. Storey (2005) provides a leadership paradigm focused on an interlocking collection of variables that influence the business or organizational background, cultural context, leadership, perceived need for management, behavioral leadership criteria, and leadership creation methods. The process as well involves a consideration of unit output outcomes and evaluations by some stakeholders. Barling et al. (1996) said that in order to trace the failures of truth to leadership is not to excuse the people, especially in a society where they elect many of their leaders and are responsible for holding them accountable. One may justify that the people's demand for honest leaders is not to be taken with full seriousness, because they often believe

what they want to hear and do not infrequently choose persons who tell them what they want to hear.

Nevertheless, the leaders are centrally placed in public squares to make social work institutions. They as well should be truthful, even when people want something other than the truth, especially then. The obligation to be truthful is an obligation of their social morality, not merely their character. Truthfulness is a requirement of leadership. When the leaders fail to honor that requirement, they invite a massive collapse of public trust, beginning from the public squares. A good leader covers trustworthy, foresighted activities, a positive attitude, and confidence. Intelligence is necessary if they would like to have a progressive ability while they are in position. They must as well have administrative skills and an excellent oriented vision about various developmental projects in their area. They are as well required to work based on justice and include various people during their development schemes. They are required to communicate with multiple people from different sections of society. Moreover, they must be honored and should have the ability to encourage other people to participate actively in social welfare events. They should be a person whom people can depend on, anyone who is in need. Sometimes, a leader must bargain with different departments; thus, in this case, a leader must be a good bargainer. Apart from that, a leader must have a keen interest in added information and informed politics to disperse the information equally to society and be a team builder.

Jeffrey (2016) views that during the 1950s, the political phenomena and power structures in Kerala society started having significant variations and fluctuations. This can be seen in the form that the Kerala society started to behave in a predominant significance to wealth and power distribution. Moreover, the aspect regarding political goals and political orientation has a notable change. One of the most significant changes in this was the decision-making, regarding the socio-political and other cultural aspects in the Kerala society, as previously facilitated and formulated by the dominated class known as kings. In contrast, throughout the 1950s, it started to have a democratic form in decision-making, taken by the legislative assembly body. However, over the independence, even though there were legislations made for woman empowerment, but there were significant constraints for the women development, especially when it comes to the personal life and their sexual life, unlike during the previous times, in which women had significant domination in their personal life and sexual life due to the concept of a matriarchal society, even though Kerala women enjoyed significant control over their lives over these factors, compared to the other parts of India, where women enjoyed less freedom and voices concerning their life and well-being.

Concerning woman empowerment, it can be seen that the public policy and its development have been aligned with women's political empowerment and development. This can be seen in the form of political participation of women in the election, especially at the Kerala state election, in which there was an 8% higher turnout for the 1970 election than the national level, in which it was 72.3 percentage in 1980. In contrast, in the Kerala state election, it was the highest. However, all Indian turnout was 64.1 percentage in 1984 for the general elections, immediately

following the assassination of Ms. Indhira Gandhi. It shows the election after the assassination of Ms. Indhira Gandhi; the women's participation in the form of the adult franchise must be significantly lesser than the normal political participation of women in the state-level elections in Kerala. This can mostly be attributed to the political reforms in the Kerala society in the form of education, land reforms, and various health and social programs that were initiated by the government, which function as a catalyst for the public's welfare, especially woman in the society. One notable feature that needs to be seen is that it did not show much progress in the political leadership of women and girls, unlike other parts of India.

This can be seen in the form of the male domination and the sidelining of female leadership, especially concerning (Devika, 2019) Akkamma Cheriyan (1909-82), who was once the prominent phase of the Congress party in Kerala during the political struggles and agitations in 1938. However, in post-independent India, she was sidelined by the Congress party and denied of any particular position by the Kerala congress party. Another significant political figure who gained prominence was K. R. Gouri (born in 1919). Even though she gained popularity and was expected to become the first chief minister of Kerala, she was sidelined by the male-dominated political leadership of the Communist Party of India that chose E.M.S Namboothiri pad as the first chief minister. Another significant aspect that needs to be noticed that even though women got significant schooling and were able to take part in the salaried position as employment, but when it comes to their financial management and administration in the household, there was a lack of empirical data regarding this, and it was very difficult to get quantified (Devika, 2019; Jeffrey, 2016; Rinzu, 2017).

Regarding the sex ratio and birth rate, one of the significant declining or negative trends in the Indian context is Kerala. This can be attributed to the willingness of the family, especially the parents, to educate their girl children and get them married at a later stage rather than at early marriages that are prevalent in the Indian society, thus facilitating the declining birth rate to 42 percent. However, even though women were educated and employed in salaried positions in their management of the public policy and administrative mechanisms, it still shows significant negative trends. Thus, when making a comparison regarding recent positions in the post-democratic and pre-democratic period of the 1800s, one of the significant contradictions is that due to the matrilineal mechanisms of the Kerala society during the 1800s, it facilitated women to have schooling even before the initiation of the State education system in the Kerala society during the 1980s. Another significant aspect that was noted during that period was the coming of the European missionaries, especially the conversion processes that were taken during that time to convert the upper-caste Hindu society to Syrian Catholic Christians. Similar to the matrilineal section of the society, the converted Syrian Christians and the Christian missionaries as well ensured that the girl children from the community could get primary education. This facilitated the higher education rate of the Kerala society during that time, as there were 19 percentage of girls in primary age in Travancore, and 14 percentage in Cochin had education in 1989. In contrast, it was only 4 percentage for the whole Madras presidency.

When it comes to the administration and management of schools, it can be seen that there was a division of both public and private schools in the society, mostly as the government administration mostly managed public schools. In contrast, the private schools were managed by the private institutional mechanisms for management, mostly with the funding and aid of the government. One of the most beneficiaries who benefited from this mechanism is the Christian missionaries and their management, which run many private sector schools in Kerala. This figure got further heightened, especially after the independence in the 1950s, when around 87 percent of Kerala girls had primary education, which can be attributed to the modernistic approach of the Kerala society during that time and the egalitarian policies envisaged by the first independent government headed by the Communist Party of India. However, after the 1950s, other religious and ethnic groups came forward, concerning the management of the schools, especially the Nair community from the Hindu society, thus making the administration and management of schools as a part of ethnic politics and religious divisions in the Kerala society. Thus, the educational development, which was initiated by the 1870s, bought by the matriarchal system and the initiation of the Christian missionaries, became advanced in the modern period and got more complex and interlinked with their religion and caste politics (Lankina, Getachew, 2013; Menon, McQueeney, 2020).

When looking at the aspect of women's organizations, parties, and institutions that represent women's issues and voice their rights, it is much less scattered in the Kerala society. One of the significant aspects that distinguish Kerala from other parts of India is the highest number of working women hostels or institutions in Kerala, which shows the highest percentage of working-age women in society. However, when it comes to the administration and management of public policy, it can be seen that even though there is a hugely significant number of working-age women population, there is less participation in the public policy and their management by the woman in the Kerala society. This creates a greater struggle for woman in the public realm as well as in the family and societal role, as the policies do not facilitate the subjugation of women in the household. Even though due to the Hindu Code Bill envisaged by Dr. B.R Ambedkar at the national level provided a great amount of relief to the Hindu woman across the country, but when it comes to the management of Christian and Muslim women, it can be seen that they still come under the radar of religious laws, which were prevalent in the society. One of the significant examples regarding this is the Christian inheritance law, which acts as an obstacle for woman to claim the inheritance of the family property, thereby depriving their rights concerning family inheritance.

Another significant characteristic trait of the Kerala society, especially the male patriarchal mindset, is that when it comes to women's involvement in the public realm, society is somehow soft towards women's education and employment. Still, when it comes to political empowerment or participation in the political realm, it creates tensions in the society as well as domestic life. These are mainly due to the resistance to abide by the woman who formulated the policies and the form of character assassination of women representatives, thereby defaming them in the society (Jeffrey, 1992). One of the significant character traits or achievements

bestowed on the Kerala society is the findings of the World Bank, which appreciates the South Indian state of Kerala for its gender development activities and developments. According to the World Bank report, Kerala society provides greater significance for gender development with a high child sex ratio and lowest maternal deaths and women with education and employment opportunities and even par with men (Devika, 2016).

However, even though there is the highest participation and education for women and men, when it comes to women's labor participation, it can be seen that it is lower or insignificant in the Kerala society. Furthermore, in recent times, there has been a declining trend that further reduces women's participation in the labor sector in society. One of the significant distinctions between rural and urban Kerala is that both men and women do similar occupations and wages in rural Kerala. Still, when it comes to the urban Kerala, women outnumbered men in their highest positions and higher salary jobs. Another significant aspect is the girl's safety, which stands significantly apart from the rest of India with the highest sex ratio compared to other parts of India. The World Bank report attributed the highest success to Kerala society in comparison to other parts of India. Even though, while comparing with the developed world, it is not up to the mark, but in the Indian context, it has a significant number, as the child sex ratio is getting increased over the years, as it was 958 in 1991. In contrast, it increased to 960 in 2001 and finally to the position of 964 in 2011. This shows that the sex ratio is continually growing and enhancing rather than diminishing, which shows the significant progress concerning women empowerment and gender development in Kerala society over the years.

Another significant trait of Kerala society is the prejudicated mentality and mindset towards women's development and history. The historical narratives looking at the women's participation in the historical moments states that women's participation was significantly lower in the historical moments. However, it can be seen that they have not delved into the reasons, which constrain or inhibit women from participating in such historical moments (Devika, 2013). If explored, it can be seen that these constraints are not due to the woman's inhibition to come forward to the Kerala society's political movements, but due to the lack of opportunity and the patriarchal mindset that act as barriers in making such advancements and participation at the historical moments. Thus, when making historical narratives regarding the political participation, it has to be seen objectively, looking at the lower participation of women in historical moments and the justification and reasons behind such inhibitions and constraints for women to participate. It must be noted that the women's political participation in historical moments and other activities is mostly contextual and depends on the facilitating factors and constraints of the space and time, in which they were involved (Bajdo, Dickson, 2001).

When it comes to leadership, it has to be noted that women's leadership depends on various social, cultural, and economic factors, which either act as a facilitating factor or a hindrance for women to participate in the industry positions political participation. When looking at the participation of women in the leadership position, it can be seen that if there is enhanced woman participation in the political leadership, it indicates the societal embracement and appreciation of a woman's role

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and their skills, which were needed to be embedded in the political leadership of the society (Adler, 1999). However, due to the mindset of the society and the glass ceiling, which is still inhibiting woman from making their political participation in the leadership position, and the huge amount of literature that overlooked the reasons behind facilitating such political leadership, they can be seen as major obstacles when it comes to the woman empowerment and their political participation in leadership positions.

Even though society tried to embrace and be cordial at the collective level, when it comes to the individual level, such scenarios have not been penetrated into such an extent (Hankivsky et al., 2010). The patriarchal mindset is still relevant in the society, as it can be seen that even though women are now working and having their education and acting as breadwinners, but when it comes to the aspect of family responsibility, the male-dominated households still prefer women to bear the responsibility of the household, especially concerning the maintenance of the kitchen and taking care of the in-laws (Rothbard, 2001). Another significant challenge that women are facing in the workplace regard less flexibility in work-related activities. Due to this, women face a lot of pressure, especially the lack of time and flexibility to manage both the household activities and the work-related activities at the same time. These scenarios create tensions and hardship for women in personal and professional life (Eikhof et al., 2013). The academic research and scholarly field are now focusing on activities that try to combine the leadership traits and qualities of both males and females, thereby trying to formulate mechanisms that can facilitate inclusive, assertive, aggressive competition, depending on the contextual aspects (Eikhof et al., 2013; Walby, 1989).

Figure 14 shows the percentage of women empowerment and gender-based violence in Kerala 2017, according to India-National Family Health Survey 2015–2016. The above presented chart shows the comparison during the period between 2005–2006 and 2015–2016. Even though few of the parameters, such as women aged between 15 to 24 using hygiene methods of production during their menstrual periods, women having a mobile phone that they use, women owing a house and land alone or jointly with others, and ever-married women who have ever experienced violence during any pregnancy, did not have a comparison or comparative analysis due to the absence of statistical data during 2005–2006. However, regarding other areas, they show a comparative analysis and some significant statistical analysis that highlights the significance and empowerment of women in Kerala during this time. Regarding the parameters mentioned above, the parameters, which show significance attributed to women, especially regarding their self-reliance, and their participation in decision-making can be attributed to parameters, such as women who are currently married who usually participate in household decision-making, woman who had a bank or savings account that they use, and woman who have a mobile phone that they use. Regarding these parameters, one of the significant parameters that show a considerable increase over time is women who are married and have participated in the household decision-making, which was 88 percent in 2005. In contrast, it draws to 92.1 percentage in 2015.
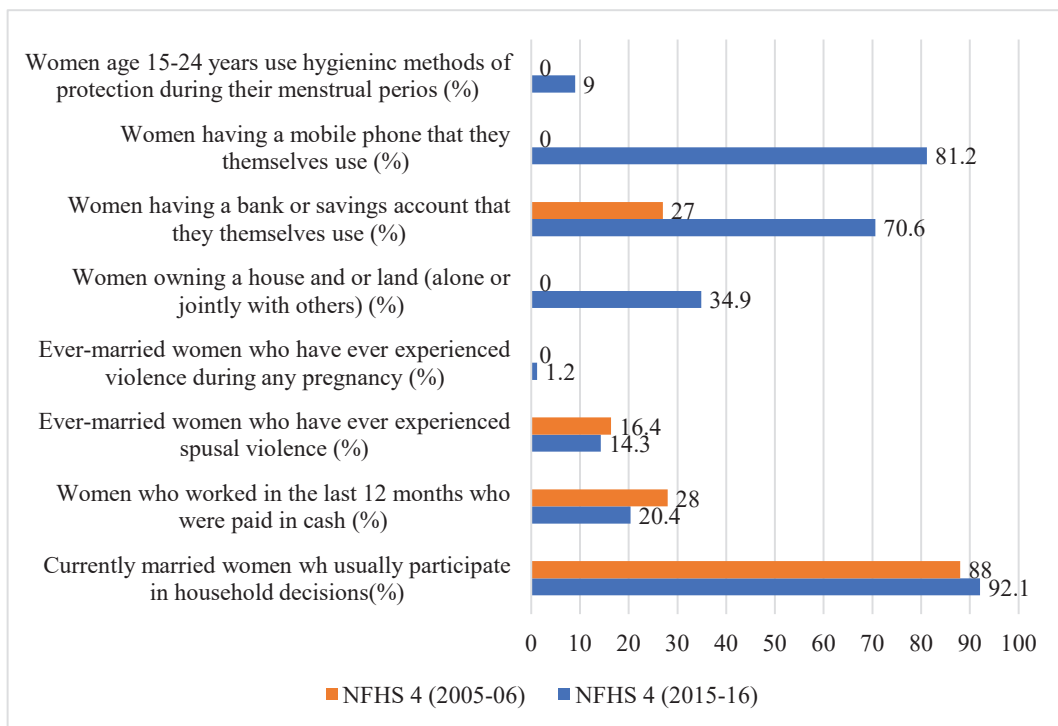
Figure 14. Percentage of women empowerment and gender-based violence in Kerala 2017

Source: India National Family Health Survey 2015–2016

Another significant parameter is regarding women having a bank or savings account, which they use that has a great significance and improvement, as it was only 27 percent during 2004. In contrast, it got to 70.6 percentage in 2015. Another significant parameter is regarding woman who had a mobile phone for themselves. Even though there was a lack of availability of data for 2005, it shows a significant percentage of 81.2 during 2015, which shows great self-reliance, especially regarding household decision, making individual financing and financial stability, and regarding communication mechanisms, which they can have, the independence, and reliability. Another significant aspect that can be seen is regarding the ownership of the property. Even though, unlike other parameters, which have a significant percentage especially more than 70 percent of representation, regarding the ownership of household or property either individually or jointly, did not show that much, but making healthy comparison to other parts of India, it has a significant rate of 34.9 percentage of women who own property alone or jointly during 2015. However, there was a lack of data available during 2005.

Another aspect that requires significant attention is the perpetration of violence towards women, especially within the household. This is one of the most neglected scenarios, especially when it comes to spousal violence. It can be seen that even

though the percentage of violence perpetrated against women during pregnancy was significantly lower during 2015, as it was only 1.2; however, when it comes to the violence within the marital relationship, it can be seen as significantly having a greater percentage, as it has 16.4 percentage during the time of 2005. In contrast, it got a reduction, but not much, to 14.3 percentage during 2015. However, one of the most concerning factors regarding woman empowerment is hygiene from the parameters mentioned above. Even though making a comparison with other parts of India where the hygiene aspect is significantly lower; however, in Kerala, it has been enhanced, but when it comes to the hygiene of woman, especially during the age group from 15 to 24, it shows significantly lower percentage, as it was only nine percent during 2015, and the data regarding 2005 is not available. Thus, from the above-mentioned Figure 14, when it comes to women empowerment, the state of Kerala shows significant progress, especially concerning financial independence and self-reliance, and other aspects of the marital relationship, while comparing to other aspect parts of India.

Various forms of violence inhibit female's cognitive, physical, and social development. The type of spousal abuse and injury during childbirth is alarming. Another essential aspect is land and property ownership. Although there is no data available for 2005–2006 at 34.9%, the data is satisfactory for 2015–2016. The last element related to the salaries and earnings that have been obtained with money over the previous year as well demonstrates a decreasing pattern from 28% points in 2005–2006 to 20.4% in 2015–2016.

The struggles of women for full rights in the community and the political movement were not encouraged. Even in the labor movement, women's organizational competence and egalitarianism were not recognized enough. There is no point in arguing that this is because of the lack of education of working women. It is a fact that uneducated men have often been promoted to labor unions and political movements. The movements have often been hesitant to accept women and working women as full workers. There were many women in the early labor unions, as a select factory committee for women. However, they did not continue to evolve over the years.

According to the European Commission and Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (2017), decision-making equity between women and men is essential to represent society's composition, improve democracy, and encourage proper functioning. It will likely support the EU's economic growth and competitiveness. Women's under-representation in the elected and appointed political roles remains a critical issue in the EU and most EU Member States. However, the situation differs widely among the EU Member States. Women's under-representation in decision-making is a comprehensive and multifaceted concern that needs to be tackled in several policy initiatives to improve gender equality at all levels of society, including schooling, jobs, family, and private life. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation (Council of Europe, 2003) on women and men's equal involvement in political and public decision-making and made suggestions. The representation of women and men in any decision-making body in politics or public life should not fall below

40%, proposing that Member State governments accept at least one step. Furthermore, inclusive participation is one of the five strategic priorities of the new Gender Equality Policy during 2014–2017 Council of Europe.

The findings from EUROPA (2018) as well noticed that party recruiters testify that women are harder to convince than men to run for the office; thus, the recruiting and nominating women candidates will require a different approach to conventional recruitment. The messages should be better aimed at women's desires and perspectives and should be carried out long before elections to counter gender inequality effectively. The negative effect of specific electoral structures on women's political participation in elected bodies should be considered as well. Women candidates have less political party campaign support and more limited personal financial resources, affecting their electoral performance and career. The gender mainstreaming training for all political parties and parliament members, including action plan for all new members (training, manuals, mentoring, coaching) should be supported, focusing on the younger generations. By conducting awareness-raising activities on the importance of women's political participation, presenting success stories and role models, can influence women leaders. Especially during the election season, adopting statutory electoral legislation to ensure that women and men are fairly representing successful implementation can improve women's political participation.

They encourage political parties to promote transparent and open recruitment, candidate selection, and professional development processes and work practices. Then, the constructive steps, such as monitoring gender change and gender quotas to access the decision-making posts, fair inclusion of women and men in candidate selection committees can be achievable. Ondercin (2017) finds that the changes in parties due to the political realignments and changes in the gender makeup of congressional delegations have provided more reliable signals for voters about their gendered social identity. The party-in-government sex composition shifts gradually give individuals a more accurate indication of parties' portrayal of their gendered social identities. The theoretical claim and results on women's representation and Southern realignment affirm the importance of controlling political leader's mass political conduct (Carsey, Layman, 2006). In Beauregard's (2017) opinion, women's political involvement can only occur when quotas are valid mechanisms for women's representation. It will exist when the elected domestic political actors follow percentages. The democracies can lead to smaller gender differences in political participation, as people are more likely to view these quotas as a valid mechanism for increasing women's representation. Women in developed industrial democracies have more than incremental. Gender quotas or increased mobilization of women by political actors may provide such a shift in women's representation, eventually affecting gender disparities in political participation. Gender quotas literature specifies that several variables are related to their effectiveness in raising women's representation.

Hughes and Tripp (2015) found that expanding women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa has been remarkable in recent decades. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of women's lawmakers in African parliaments tripled, resulting in

African countries having the highest parliamentary representation rates worldwide. The prevailing reasons for this transition were structural factors (i.e., gender quotas and proportional representation systems) and democratization. Over the past thirty years, expanding women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa has been exceptional. The legislators in African parliaments tripled between 1990 and 2010, whereas many of the world's poorest countries enjoy some of the highest female legislative representation rates. For decades, in political representation, African women consistently fell far below the world average. After World War II, Africa witnessed the highest civil conflict rates, followed by significant competition decreases over the past two decades, accompanied by rapid increases in women's representation. Government and warring parties create new constitutions or peace mechanisms; they frequently ignore women's needs or outwardly limit or restrict women's rights.

Recently, the studies have mentioned a positive correlation between armed conflict and women's political participation in Africa (Bauer, Britton, 2006). Although religiously motivated and pious, many Islamic women's rights activists in Turkey are strategically framing their demands for women's head scarfed, right to secular political representation, to cater to society's material parts, and influence pro-religious elites (Tajali, 2015). The Coalition did not support a single presidential candidate to move the women's demands away from Iran's factional rivalries. Instead, they openly requested that all four candidates place women's rights at the forefront of their policies, including women's political representation.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2014) observes that a wide range of factors determines the extent of women's representation in the elected offices in any given country. It includes the overall progress towards equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the public and private spheres, the choice of political and electoral structures, and the level of institutionalization and openness of decision-making processes. The extent of women's representation in national legislatures or executives in any given broad range of factors determines the country, including the overall progress towards the equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the public and private spheres, the nature of political and electoral structures, and the degree of institutionalization and transparency in politics. Institutionalizing gender equality is essential if men and women enjoy equal political rights and resources.

Malhotra et al. (2002) found that women's empowerment fundamentally shifts the submissive relationships between family and culture. It is a functional mechanism that requires opposition, confrontation and aims to redistribute sex control. Empowerment requires effective procedures, services, and organizations as well. In empowering, the poor, grassroots, and intermediary NGOs play an essential part. Empowerment is not a one-way operation. Women recognize and subjugate the structural mechanisms of authority and cultivate the capacity and power to affect social progress through the current and organized mind-witnessing method. Yet, liberation is not about the attitude change. The collective action to transform the structures of gender norms is involved as well. Training is essential to plan for women's liberation. In a state-created room for creative education programs for

vulnerable rural women, the women's commitment to bringing public education to the forefront of women's empowerment is evident. Women feminists collaborated with grassroots women to redefine women's literacy for equality while opposing the existing education and training systems that concentrate exclusively on women's literacy skills (Patel, 1998). The educated women are more skilled than men in a particular field, and land ownership empowers women in family decision-making. With the conventional role of breadwinner, men's dominance keeps its role in substantial social and international regard (Hanlon, 2012). When female power grows more visibly, this reduces women's absolute absence and gradually changes men's unconscious role. Since men and women should have equal opportunities in many regions globally, male-reserved privileges, such as the positions for the elected officials or power over society, are less utilized by women.

In Kerala's history, women and children, especially girls, have been subjected to various forms of discrimination and enslavement in multiple places. Although many women in Kerala's history have fought for various forms of equality, they deserve a democratic country. Few historical studies mention the political interventions of such women. Nowadays, it is necessary to make women more active by studying the socio-cultural dimensions and closely observing them. There have been various women's movements for their rights in Kerala since time immemorial. Still, they are not getting enough importance in this period. Nowadays, 50% of equality that is achieved through the local bodies is a scheme that will help women to enter politics, but it is as well important to note that women were active in Kerala's public sphere in the past. From the nineteenth century onwards, the idea that women's importance in politics needed to be recognized arose in many social spheres. However, there was no change in Kerala when various social reformers, especially male-dominated social reformers, firmly believed that women did not need to enter politics. It is often overlooked that women came to power in Kerala even before the British rule.

Before independence, Kerala's state was scattered in three princely states: Kochi, Travancore, and Malabar. In nineteenth century Travancore, there was a social custom in which women who belonged to the lower caste (Avarna) had not to wear clothes from the waist up. It was a compulsory practice, and women were walking around half-naked. Although only upper-caste women (Savarnas) could dress up and cover their entire body, even upper-caste women had to show their upper body when they entered the Hindu temples. The Hindu priest was considered a representative of God. Hence, it is a way of paying respect to the God by being half-naked inside the temples. Therefore, the priests in the temples could see the breasts of the higher caste women.

The so-called lower class was not allowed to wear cloth in public places; in other words, it was a way of paying respect of the lower caste to the upper caste. If more inferior caste women were to dress and not display their breasts, not to follow these rigid inhumane practices, they would be forced to pay taxes, according to their breasts, called a Mulakkaram (Breast tax). Many lower caste women worked hard to change this practice and access clothes to cover their bodies (Thomas, 2012).

As part of colonialism, Christian missionaries who came to India became advocates against such social degradation and did their best to educate women and children and teach the English language. Based on the charitable activities of various missionaries who came to the country during colonialism, they started teaching society about self-dignity. They provided awareness about their rights against oppression. Thereby, women and men from the lower caste decided to fight against such practices and conducted various protests. Thus, the lower caste men and women in society began to think alike for their rights and work against oppression (Kosambi, 1992).

In order to get access and a proper clothing facility for women in the lower caste, they organized a revolt that is widely known as Channar Revolt. It took place in Travancore, where women and men from lower caste or lower caste communities fought to protect their rights and allow them to dress modestly. Colonel Monroe, the Diwan Judicial Officer of the then Travancore Court, acted in 1813 to appease the upper castes and quell the agitation (Karunakaran, 2004). However, the Nadar community's women have declared the right to dress as they wished because of the ongoing agitations.

It enacted that lower caste women (Nadar) should first convert to Christianity, and then wear clothes to cover their breasts. Simultaneously, they should not wear clothes as those worn by the upper caste women in the Nair community. Due to various agitations, such an order was withdrawn without being expanded. The members of the upper caste argued that they could not treat upper-caste women and lower caste women as equal. The upper caste feared that they were losing their control over the slavery of the lower caste (Kent, 2011). However, the more inferior community women who tried to organize various agitations and strive for all kinds of rights, such as the Hindu women, faced severe challenges. The Nairs (Savarnas) publicly tore women's clothes and abused them in public spaces. With the abolition of slavery in Travancore in 1855, various riots and revolts for equality and justice were revived. Hence, the upper castes felt they were losing control over the lower castes, which forced them to resist social change.

There is a popular legend concerning women's rights movements in Kerala. During the 18th and 19th centuries, when Kerala faced various situations of slavery and insecurity, a woman called Nangeli was often depicted in the pages of history as a mere female character. Nangeli was a courageous woman who lived in Travancore and realized the need for social change. Nangeli was a poor and economically backward woman. The story goes that Nangeli had to pay the breast tax, since she wore clothes on her upper body. She was forced to pay the breast tax, according to the size of her breasts. Since she did not have money for the tax, with a vindictive mind, she cut off her breasts in anger and wrapped both breasts in a banana leaf in front of the upper caste men who came to collect the taxes. Nangeli died soon after due to the blood loss. The story goes that Nangeli's husband burned himself to death on the pyre of Nangeli in grief as he could not bear the end of his beloved wife. The history says that Nangeli's husband was the first to customize "SATI" or self-immolation (Jayan, Sankaranarayanan, 2017).

Further on, it is necessary to discuss many similar agitations in Kerala's history in the 18th and 19th centuries and the current movements for the security of women's rights in the 21st century. In the past, women fought for the right to dress in order to shield themselves from their nudity. These courageous women have fought for the country's independence and for the present period women who continue to struggle for equal access to power and political participation. It needs to be noted that all these women deserve to be remembered. Even though many women in Kerala are powerful enough to claim their leadership in politics and enter the political arena, there are still many barriers to overcome due to various social and cultural conditions. Women leaders are not common due to the consideration at various parties and governance bodies. Thus, there were brave women in Kerala's history who fought back to defend their rights by facing counter-oppression and reacting strongly against such ideologies. From the Channar Rebellion to the 21st century, various movements against women's insecurity and protecting their rights have continuously taken place in society.

It is often forgotten that Kerala's women have been actively working with political movements for their right to change and equality against various forms of communalism in the workplace. Kerala has faced environmental pollution for the past decades due to the different companies, operating in the commercial sector. Therefore, powerful women and various agitations under their leadership have created a societal movement for an intense fight against such pollution, proving that women can participate in politics and administration. Due to the encroachment of male power and domination in the political sphere, women with a sense of leadership often do not enter the legislative body and become common working party members and local officials.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the most famous Hindu saints in the world. When Swami Vivekananda came to Kerala after traveling all over India, he described Kerala as a branthalayam (lunatic asylum). He described Kerala in the light of various forms of racism, caste discrimination, violence against women, inequality, and insecurity prevailing in Kerala society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Namboodiripad, 1967).

Rural labor organizations initiated various renaissance ideologies and movements, and the workers tirelessly tried to bring significant changes in Kerala through their protests. Various Renaissance leaders, e.g., Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambiswamy, and Ayyankali, changed the society by challenging Kerala's customs and feudal system. Multiple interventions and struggles took place in Kerala to solve women and children's problems during various renaissance changes, the protection of their rights, the privilege of widows to remarry, and the right to education. Because of all those activities, Kerala has become the number one state in India, regarding human development and other indexes.

The written historical records show that the renaissance heroes in Kerala society were always men, but the women's history coming forward for empowerment should not be forgotten. The history of women's renaissance is different. There were various agitations for the rights of women who were marginalized as the second-class citizens to move forward. As a result, the Land

Reforms Act was enacted in Kerala to protect women's needs and racially oppressed rights. In 17–19 centuries, Kerala's living conditions were kept away from the kitchen during their first menstrual period. Society considered menstrual blood impurity; hence, women during their menstrual days did not cook and had to stay in another room until it finishes. During the last period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various women reformers emerged among the Muslim community. Such renaissance leaders worked to prevent the oppression of Muslim women. Halima Beevi, a Muslim woman, has repeatedly tried to explain Muslim women's plight in Kerala through her writings and speeches. Halima Beavis has made it clear that men's support of women can bring equality at various conferences. She organized women to fight for their rights and freedom (Vinayan, Raj, 2019).

Anna Chandy was the first woman High Court judge in India and widely known as the first-generation feminist. She was the first woman judge in the Anglo-Saxon world and was elected from 1932 to 1934 to the Kerala assembly. Another woman activist Arya Pallam was a famous social reformer in Kerala. Violating her father-in-law's orders, she attended various public events for women's empowerment, went to meetings with other religions, encouraged lower caste children to enter the Hindu temples, and fought against the lower caste oppression (Singh et al., 2019). During the first-ever general election, Annie Mascarene was an Indian independence activist and parliamentarian from Thiruvananthapuram in the Indian parliament. Mascarene was one of the first women to join the Travancore State Congress.

Along with Akkamma Cherian and Pattom Thanu Pillai, she was a Travancore State's liberation and unification movement leader. She was incarcerated for separate periods of political activity between 1939 and 1947. Mary Lukose from the Kottayam district in Kerala was popular because Indian universities did not give women medical admission; thus, she moved to London and obtained MBBS from London University, becoming Kerala's first woman to graduate from medicine. After returning to Kerala in 1922, she was appointed to the Travancore Legislative Assembly, known as the Sree Chitra State Council, becoming the state's first woman legislator. Another influential woman leader Dakshayani Velayudhan was born in Kerala to a lower-caste Pulaya family. She was engaged in civil disobedience against the upper caste and later appointed to the Cochin Legislative Council in 1945. Velayudhan was elected from the Madras Constituent Assembly (Meera, 1983). At 34, she was one of the Constituent Assembly's youngest and only Dalit women. She made crucial interventions on the untouchability questions, forced labor, reservations, and worked for having separate Dalit electorates. KR Gouri Amma is a prominent female politician in the left-wing governments of 1957, 1967, 1980, and 1987.

In contemporary Kerala, one of the most significant achievements in the 21st century is the social reforms achieved in the women's wall (Vanitha mathil) and the women's entry into the Sabarimala temple. Vanitha Mathil created a human chain. The most famous Hindu temples are in the Pathanamthitta district. In this Sabarimala temple, there is a rule that women between the ages of 10 and 50 are not

allowed to enter the temple. The main reason for this is that women between the ages of 10 and 50 have a menstruation cycle; therefore, they have menstrual blood. Thus, if women enter the temple, the temple's sanctity will be lost; hence, only women over the age of 50 or under the age of 10 can enter the temple. However, with the Supreme Court of India in 2019, such entry of women from Sabarimala violated women's fundamental rights to enter Sabarimala. But there were various religious protests all over Kerala against this verdict by the right-wing political organizations.

3.1.4. Women's political empowerment in Kerala through Panchayati Raj Institutions Act

Mahatma Gandhi said that "as for illiteracy among women, its causes are not mere laziness and inertia than men. A more potent cause is the status of inferiority with which an old tradition has unjustly branded her. Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure instead of regarding her as his helpmate and better half! The result is a semi-paralysis of our society. Women have rightly been called the mother of the race. We owe it to her and to ourselves to undo the great wrong that we have done her" (Mahatma Gandhi, as cited in Jain, 2005, p. 97). As the second most populated country globally, India, has over 50% of its population being women, and thus, it is necessary to improve the status of women's underrepresentation. There are various reasons for women's marginalization in Indian society, mainly those under tradition, religion, caste, and family status. Patriarchy still holds back women from their access to political leadership, especially in a political party, where the head is male. In this scenario, there is less chance for a woman to be in the highest leadership position due to the party's lack of opportunity sharing due to the men's domination in the highest party positions. Political empowerment is about engaging in informal decision-making bodies, including local government, interest groups, civil society, and women's capacity to set political agendas and control them. Social empowerment refers to women's status in an organization, which depends on the social norms, household, and community gender roles, and social capital. The constraints related to women's political empowerment have limited access to the decision-making power and low literacy, trust, and leadership rates.

Nowadays, election is one of the most prominent conditions for any person to enter the political arena. A person who wishes to enter a leadership position, participate in a political party, and participate in their activities must become active in the political arena through the proper citizenship exercise. Being a party member is one of the most important criteria for being involved in the political arena. It is the support and recognition of all parties that give guidance to any country or governance system. However, women have been recognized in the public domain at times without any political party's backing. These are called independent candidates. These independent candidates are not individuals who have come to the party without the support of a party. Once these candidates have received legitimacy, there is no distinction between them and those who represent the political parties, and it is beneficial to the society. The main reason for this is that an independent candidate

faced various other parties' leadership problems during their leadership tenure. However, women could not function without party due to the patriarchal nature of society. Therefore, a country must eliminate various forms of gender discrimination and create conditions for more women to enter politics. The figure shows the theoretical model of the political empowerment of women that was developed by the World Bank.

This model depicts the hierarchical structure through which the political empowerment of women will enhance political participation and contribute to the decision-making of the women's political representatives. It could be seen that once the process of political empowerment has been envisioned, it leads to the consequent participation of women in the political process through various leadership positions and responsibilities, which will further facilitate enhancing political dialogues and discourses in the political realm, which will finally culminate in the process, in which woman are being a decisive factor for setting up agenda at the local, regional, and national levels. Thus, when it comes to the political empowerment of women, the first process is to facilitate political empowerment through which all the other processes of decision-making discourse and other aspects of political mechanisms can be ensured.

Political empowerment

↓

Women's participation, influence, and leadership

↓

Voting, participation in political dialogue and discourse

↓

Capacity to set the agenda at the local, regional, and national level
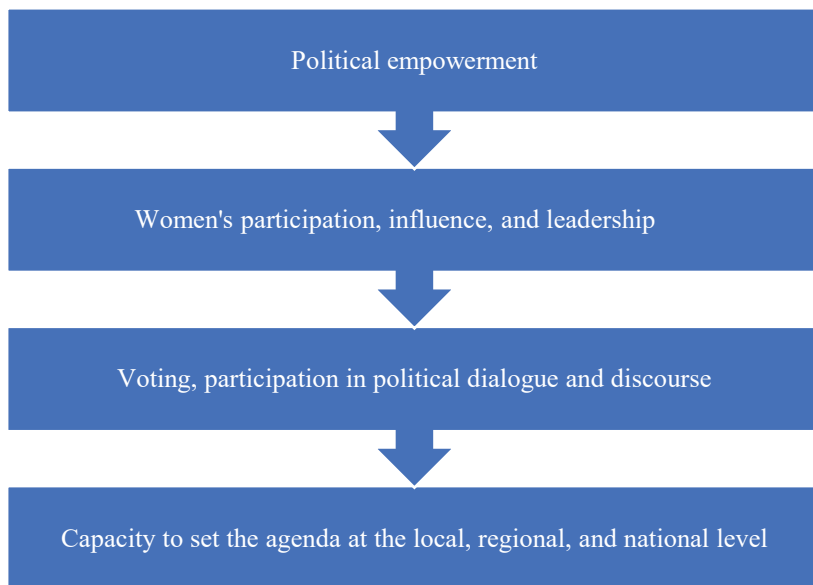
Figure 15. Interaction of women in politics theoretical model

Source: adapted from Bouta et al., 2004

Women are still much excluded from the public decision-making processes at the local government level, mostly because of the reluctance to speak out against the powerful. Besides, the restrictions on women's mobility and lack of experience can hinder their engagement with high-level political processes. On the higher political level, women are underrepresented in the formal political sphere anywhere in the

world. The patriarchal structures and norms mediate women's right to access legal, local, and national governments. Apart from the structural barriers, discriminatory laws and institutions limit women's options to run for the office. It is as well visible that women in the political realm face various forms of violence, which are in the form of physical or sexual as well as emotional and psychological abuse. Such situations eventually lead them to withdraw from being candidates or stand for election, or even be active citizens. Traditionally, in India, women's roles are entitled to household work and reproduction, taking care of the family and children rather than becoming active citizens.

Women lack sufficient time for political inclusiveness due to the family responsibilities and negligence due to the political awareness. Thus, Bakker (2007) finds that women who are active in politics face massive stigma and socio-cultural barriers, which eventually hinder their ability and confidence in political participation. In these circumstances, Panchayati Raj Institution or PRIs become an essential aid for women, joining the social and political life from the village level. In Independent India, the Belwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended the Panchayati Raj system in 1957, and Rajasthan was the first state, which implemented it. The non-violence movement, led by various nationalist leaders during the 1930s, saw a marked rise in female participation. Besides Gandhi's unique appeal to women, women's organizations and women's access to legislative councils added momentum to women's involvement in politics. Women's participation took the form of independent, non-violent movements against British rules, speeches, anti-war propaganda, and other operations. Thapar-Björkert (2006) finds that many women are willing to participate in the struggles and sufferings during the freedom fight and accept the campaign. Some were motivated by patriotic feelings and looked at India's independence as their mission to achieve their emancipation. However, after Indian independence, many women returned to their homes as housewives rather than actively participating in social justice movements and political engagement. According to Ellemer's (2017) opinion, gender expectations and attitudes must recognize women's political influence. The broader implications of this case are that the South Asian leadership literature needs to address women's growing local governance role. Recent studies on South Asia's political process suggested that many institutions give centrality to men in leadership roles, creating dominance (Reddy, Haragopal, 1985). A comprehensive analysis of women's leadership still lacks focus (Hryniewicz et al., 2018), and if women got opportunities, they could develop legitimacy through competence or control in the governance processes.

In Parayil's (1996) views, the Kerala model of development initiated by the Kerala's state is known for its radicalism, distribution of wealth, and elevated social indices for men and women. It extends from 1930 to 2000, and Kerala has undergone significant social and economic reforms, widely known as modernization. There were many social reform movements influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and Indian National Congress Party. Such social activities oppose religion and caste, leading to the political party's decisive intervention over various inequalities. With the formation of an Indian Communist Party (CPI) branch in Travancore in 1939,

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the war for freedom began. The CPI was founded in 1934 as a Communist National Congress wing. The Kerala government has historically adopted the radical socialist platform of land redistribution, large-scale public spending on education and health, and income distribution. Kerala has long been described as a welfare state with a stable civil society and high political participation. However, many women leaders at the forefront of various social movements remain unnoticed or segregated from gaining powerful positions in their party leadership.

Devika (2006) finds that men were considered affluent with political authority, economic strength, and intellectual ability in Kerala, while women seemed to benefit entirely from their attributed emotional and sentimental force. Kerala's educated women still face various challenges to improve their dignity in their political careers and agenda-setting. As Kumar (2007) points, through the Kerala model of development, it has gained attention, but there was no end to the gender division of labor in women's household life. Franke and Chasin (1994) view that leadership positions and higher educational achievement have not made Kerala women more politically active. Scaria (2014) found that most women did not have any role in decision-making regarding purchasing, their families, and hospitals in Kerala. With other decisions, they do not have many roles. Thus, a clear division could be identified, and the gap between economic and social empowerment is much more focused than the political empowerment of women in Kerala.

Figure 16 shows the number of women candidates that were selected in the Kerala State Election-Legislative Assembly from 1957–2016, according to the Election Commission of India, Kerala. Women candidates that were selected for contesting in the election and the number of women who have won in those elections could be seen in the figure. The number of women that were selected and the number of women who won shows a huge disparity from 1957 to 2016. It reflects the social, political, cultural, and other attitudes of the society when it comes to women's political participation and being selected through the electoral process. Thus, the number remained the same over the period, as it was only 6 women candidates in 1957.

The same numbers remained during the period, in which it only the represented eight women candidates that got selected during 2016. This shows that even though the number of women candidates is being represented by various political parties, the winning ratio remained the same over the period. When it comes to the women selection for candidateship, it shows a significant progress over the time. The major political parties, which are the Communist Party of India CPI (M) and the Indian National Congress (INC), have given greater representation for women candidates over the period, as it was nine women candidates who were selected in 1957, but it reached 110 during 2016. Even in such period, a considerable progress and upward growth have been witnessed from 1996, in which 55 women have been selected for various political parties, which further was 70 in 2006, 83 in 2011, and finally, culminated to 110 in 2016.
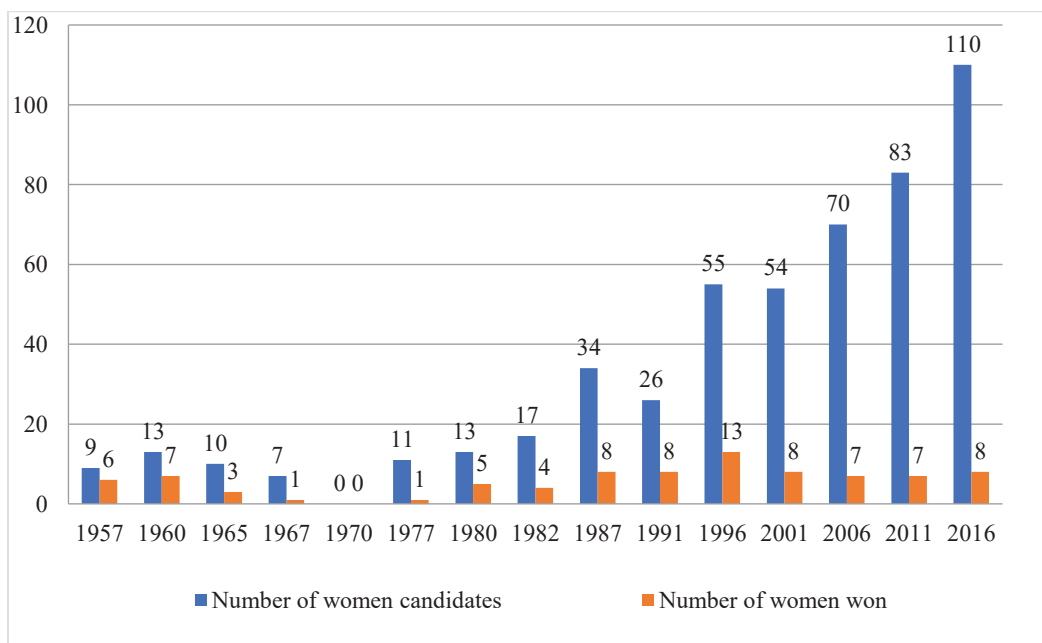
Figure 16. The number of women candidates selected in the Kerala state election, Legislative Assembly from 1957 to 2016

Source: Election Commission of India, Kerala

The only distinction in this regard for both women candidates and woman who won was the election of 1970, in which both women who have been selected as candidates and who have won remained at 0 during the reign of C Achutha Menon government, during his second term. Even though the woman representation is given by the Communist Party of India Marxist over the period from 1957 to 2016, during 1970, it did not give women any opportunity to get contested or get selected to the Kerala state election for the legislative assembly. Thus, it can be seen that the period from 1957 to 2016 shows considerable progress when it comes to the selection of women to be represented to the legislative assembly, but when it comes to their actual representation by winning the election, it remains marginally low, which can be attributed to various social, political, and cultural attitudes, such as the patriarchal mindset of the society, lower acknowledgment for women who were selected or were candidates, the male domination of the political parties, which tries to sideline the women representatives, etc.

After establishing The Panchayati Raj in 1992, various individual states in India started improving the democratic system. Thus, in the south Indian state, Kerala began multiple programs for strengthening governance at the local self-government level. Under these various land reform movements, the campaigns for socio-economic development, women empowerment have been established in Kerala. Many societies have implemented multiple schemes through cooperative companies and projects for women's economic growth to achieve women's empowerment. In Kerala, the empowerment programs are widely implemented by

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Self Help Groups (SHGs), NGOs, and women-led agencies. The state government and the schemes initiatives are known as Kudumbashree [5]projects and "Gender projects". There were various studies related to the role of Kudumbashree, which focus mainly on the economic development of women and the alleviation of poverty. However, independent research considering Kerala's women empowerment program has not been done yet. It did not research how it improves women's lives in Kerala, especially the 'gender projects scheme.'

Table 9. Local Self Government Election 2015 in Kerala, the number of elected representatives

| Type of Local Self Government | No. of Local Self Government | Wards | Elected Members | | | | | |
			Female	Male	Scheduled Cast	Scheduled Tribes	General	Total
District panchayat	14	331	174	157	33	6	292	331
Block panchayat	152	2080	1126	950	219	31	1826	2076
Municipality	87	3078	1612	1460	221	16	2835	3072
Corporation	6	414	221	191	26	0	386	412
Grama panchayat	941	15962	8709	7226	1705	243	13987	15935
Total	1200	21865	11842	9984	2204	296	19326	21826

Source: Local Body Elections Kerala 2015, State Election Commission, Government of Kerala

The above given Table 9 shows the local self-government election in 2015 in Kerala and the number of the elected representatives from both male and female categories according to the Local Body Elections Kerala 2015, State Election Commission, Government of Kerala. It can be seen that unlike the state and legislative assembly elections, there is a representation, and the winning of the female candidates is much higher and significant when it comes to the local self-government election, which can be attributed to the decentralized administrative system initiated by the Government of India and its proper implementation by the Kerala government. It can be seen that when it comes to the representation of women in the local self-government elections, in all the district panchayat, block panchayat, municipality, corporation, and gramma panchayat, it shows enhanced

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[5] Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala in 1997.

woman participation and representation. This is particularly visible as there are 174 women representatives in the district. In contrast, there were only 157 male representatives in the same category.

Regarding the block panchayat, the total woman representation is 1126, whereas it is 950 regarding men. It is 1,612 regarding woman representation at the municipality level, whereas it is 1,460 for male representation. At the corporation level, it is 221 for female representation. In contrast, it was 191 for male representation, and finally, at the Grama Panchayat, it was 8,709 for female representation, whereas it was 7,226 for male representation. Thus, when it comes to the female representation at the local body elections, there is an overall female representation of 11,842.

In contrast, it stands at 9,984 for male representation, significantly less than female representation. This shows that when it comes to the local self-government, due to various policies initiated by the government, even though the existing stereotypes and cultural restraints against female representation, unlike this state legislative and national city elections, local self-government elections show a much more progressive stance towards women's representation and them getting selected to the local self-government levels. The given below Table 10 shows the local self-government election, which happened in December 2020 in Kerala.

Table 10. The number of contested and won seats (gender wise)

Local body	Male		Female		Transgender	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
Grama Panchayat	26012	7159	28292	8804	0	0
Block Panchayat	3393	945	3539	1135	0	0
District Panchayat	685	157	597	174	0	0
Municipality	5186	1399	5158	1679	0	0
Corporation	993	189	980	225	1	0
Total	36269	9849	38566	12017	1	0

Source: Local Body Elections Kerala 2020, State Election Commission, Government of Kerala

The above-mentioned Table 10 shows the recent election to the local self-government held in 2020. It shows the classification of male and female candidates and their selection according to the Local Body Elections Kerala, 2020, State Election Commission, Government of Kerala. Similar to the previous figure, which shows the local self-government elections of 2015, the above mentioned figure as well shows similar trends in women's representation at the local self-government levels. It shows how many members were contested and how many won in the 2020 elections. It can be seen that at all levels of local self-government, the representation in the form of conducting and the actual winning is much higher for women

candidates. This can be seen in the form of contesting and representation, as at the level of the Grama Panchayat, in total, 26,012 males contested, and 28,292 females contested. When it comes to the actual representation of winning, the females outnumbered males, as the total number of females who got selected were 8,804, whereas it was only 7,159 for the male candidates. Looking at the level of block panchayat, there was a representation of 3,393 males who contested, whereas there was a representation of 3,539 females who contested. When it comes to the actual representation, in total, 945 males have been selected, in which there is a higher representation of females, as there were 1,135 females selected at the block panchayat. Another significant category is at the district panchayat level: in total, 685 males contested, and 597 females contested.

The females outnumbered males, as 174 females have been selected, whereas 157 males got selected. Another prominent region at the local self-government election is the municipal level, in which 5,186 males contested. In contrast, there is a representation of 5,158 females. Moreover, females outnumbered males to a great extent, as it was 1,679 females who won, whereas it was only 1,399 males who got selected at the municipal level. The final category in this regard is at the corporation, which is the highest level of the local self-government, in which 993 men have been contested.

In contrast, there is a representation of 980 females who have been contested. Similar to the above mentioned categories, females as well outnumbered males as there was a total selection of 225 females, and only 189 males in this selected category. Thus, at the local self-government elections of 2020, there is a great representation of women outnumbering men with a total representation of 12,017 females. In contrast, it was at the lower rate of 9,849 males in the local self-government election of 2020. Thus, women's representation at the local self-government is a steady process that was much more enhanced over time, unlike the state or national elections.

It as well shows the number of contested and elected representatives, both males and females, in the recent election at the local self-government in Kerala. Again, it could be seen that too many women were actively participating as candidates, and they outnumbered men at the election. In total, 6,269 males were contrasting at various local service government bodies. Among them, 9,849 were elected. Regarding the number of the females, about 38,556 women contested, and 12,017 women were elected. By looking at this number of elected uncontested males and females, it could be identified that more women are actively participating in political power and leadership opportunities at the local self-government institutions. This year, one transgender person was actively participating as a candidate at the local self-government. This signifies the importance of the PRI policy in Kerala and shows the importance of promoting more women into the leadership through empowerment policy.

As Kabeer (1994) points, the modern approach towards the women empowerment concept is based on the absolute values and assumptions. It relates to the industrialization and economic empowerment of women, which can reduce the gender-based inequality. Since in most cases, the imbalance of men and women

occurs in terms of income generation, educational qualification, skills, and work participation that hinder women from being equal in the society. This aspect is prominent in Kerala's case, since various governmental policies focus only on the women's economic and social development, but not on the political empowerment.

The Panchayati Raj Institution policy on women's political empowerment identifies the elected presidents' main functions in a panchayat according to the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act 1994 (KILA). The primary duties of the president at the panchayat include:

- Preside over and regulate the meetings of panchayat and Grama Sabha,[6] of which he/she is the president.
- Exercise supervision and control over the acts performed and actions taken by all officers and employees of panchayat and prepare their confidential reports.
- Incur contingent expenditure up to such limit as may be fixed by the government from time to time.
- Authorize payment and refunds of the panchayat.
- In case of emergency, the President may direct immediate execution of any work or act requiring Panchayat's sanction.
- The President of the Panchayat shall have the power to monitor staff in the panchayat office.

3.2. Leadership traits of the elected women representatives at the panchayat

This section explores the second objective of this research. In order to conduct an empirical study to identify elected women representatives' leadership traits and analyze how it strengthens their political leadership at the panchayat. In order to find out the leadership traits of the elected women representatives at the panchayat, this study analyzes five leadership traits suggested by Northouse (2013): intelligence, confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Thus, to evaluate leadership traits, the author produced five domains in this study: governance, political participation, decision-making ability, administrative skills, and finally, the influencing capacity of the elected women leaders at the panchayat to determine how their leadership traits aid women in becoming politically empowered.

Thus, the author has developed five questions and asked the elected women representatives:

- How does intelligence contribute to the governance in the panchayat?
- How does self-confidence contribute to the participation in politics at the panchayat?
- How does the determination contribute to the decision-making at the panchayat?
- How does integrity contribute to the administrative ability at the panchayat?

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[6] Grama Sabha is the grass root level democratic institution in a village in the PRI.

- How does sociability enable influential capacity in politics at the panchayat?

Intelligence

Therefore, to identify if the elected women representatives possess intelligence as a leadership trait, this research uses the given question "How does intelligence contribute to the governance in the panchayat?". For the analysis, the author is using a list of indicators associated with intelligence and tries to find out if the elected women representatives at the panchayat can use their skills as listed for the efficient governance at their corresponding panchayats, as shown in Table 11.

According to Northouse (2013), intelligence as the intellectual ability of the leader is a very important part of leadership. He says that intelligence includes strong verbal ability, perceptual ability, reasoning skills, communication, higher IQ, problem-solving skills, and social judgment skills.

However, according to the empirical findings, the author has found that women leaders at the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute some other important key intelligent indicators, such as constant activism, value-oriented, knowledge, and awareness, human rights advocate, participation in Gramasabha, negotiation skills, objective, power structure uses, self-monitoring, emotional intelligence, behavioral control, media management, risk-taking and being radical that make them strong leaders. Therefore, the obtained results show that leader's intelligence is very important in order to be a successful leader, and thereby women leaders can improve the governance in the panchayat.

Verbal ability can be seen as one of the important indicators of intelligence of a leader. In this study, most of women leaders consider that a person who believes to be efficient in the governance at the panchayat and provides grievances to the deprived sections of the society, has to be good at verbal communication. Being a good discussant enabled them to hear the people's grievances appropriately and make the right decisions without any delay. It has been noted that women leaders are supposed to continuously contact local party members, even if they are right-wing, left-wing, or independent. In order to make decisions in a panchayat, a leader must communicate equally and convey the message to others. Perceptual ability can be seen as one of the significant traits that is needed for woman in the intelligence category. Through perceptual ability, women leaders ensure fairness and transparency in the administration and the social-cultural realm. Having the state of perceptual ability shows them to be constantly vigilant towards various negative traits within the administration and society, thereby taking measures to rectify those odds and bring transparency and fairness at both societal and administrative levels. This is especially significant in the case of the district, as through the mechanism of perceptual ability, women leaders ensure transparency in the administration and taking concrete measures for the proper allocation of resources during the natural times as well as during calamities, especially within a district, which is prone to natural disasters.

Another significant aspect within the intelligence category is reasoning skills. Similar to the emotional intelligence that has been mentioned above, reasoning skills

as well enable women leaders to see and perceive reasoning skills, providing justice without any subjective inclination. Reasoning skill has been a significant aspect of the intelligence category. As a part of intelligence, the communication skill of leaders is another important indicator. In this study, the women representatives believed that through participation in the political process, such as being a member of a political party and then getting elected to the local self-governance, as the president, they were able to enrich their intelligence aspect with the experience through the local self-governance process. They developed understanding skills, emotional intelligence, human rights activism, and various other intelligence traits through the intelligence aspect. They developed a sense of belonging to the community, thereby acting as a significant catalyst for change in the community's development process. Moreover, they state that being a woman president, they have a more approachable attitude of the society, thereby trying to reach the vulnerable sections of the society, such as women, children, and deprived sections, stating their grievances to the women presidents. Thus, through this process, they understood the real issues of society, thereby trying to formulate mechanisms through their intelligence aspect and its various characteristics, facilitating significant policy mechanisms and changes to overcome these grievances. Thus, one of the significant characteristic traits of the leadership of intelligence has a significant role regarding women's political participation at the leadership position in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, thereby acting as a significant catalyst for social change.

Another significant aspect in the intelligence aspect can be seen higher IQ, as the head of the administrative autonomy can be seen as one of the most significant aspects through which the woman leadership will enable to implement those policies and programs and for the allocation of funds, which will be beneficial for the overall development of the society. Therefore, higher IQ is one of the most significant aspects when it comes to the intelligence category. The district's case has great significance, as a higher IQ will facilitate women's leadership to make speedy allocation of funds and other resources, especially in natural calamities, thereby avoiding the risk and reducing the casualties. Another significant aspect in the intelligence category is the problem-solving skills of leadership. It must be noticed that the administrative process will have proper functioning through proper quality performance delivery mechanisms. The services will be delivered to the public, solving various societal issues and getting rid of their grievances. Another significant aspect in the intelligence category is the social judgment skills of leaders. In this study, the author has found that women leaders have to be careful when dealing with various developmental projects in the panchayat, especially since there is a stigma in society that women leaders are not capable enough to make decisions, according to the requirements, due to lack of prior experience in politics or lack of knowledge about the citizens who comes under certain specific panchayat, they may not be able to reach out everyone. In such cases, if a leader has to be strong enough to get societal support, they must have social judgment skills, deal with various issues, and solve problems equally as a man.

Another significant trait in the category of intelligence that has been found from the empirical study is constant activism. Through persistent activism, the

woman leadership ensures that justice is appropriately delivered to the society and their grievances have been heard. It is especially significant in the district taken for the study. Due to the district's vulnerability to various natural calamities, constant activism is required to meet the grievances and take rapid actions to get rid of the grievances. Another indicator is value orientation, which can be considered a deliberate act of showing kindness, strategy, and progress in various developmental project implementation by considering every resident in the locality's opinion. If a leader can give value and consideration to its residents, ordinary people will as well respect and value a woman leader. Another key indicator associated with intelligence is the knowledge and awareness of elected leaders of various legal regulations, awareness of funding allocations, understanding of the problem in each ward in their panchayat, awareness of the quick policies that have to be implemented in their panchayat without any delay in case of emergency scenario, e.g., natural calamities, etc. Therefore, the author has found that women leaders had to gain more strength in their leadership by awareness and knowledge about almost all governance measures in their respective panchayat.

From the empirical study, it has been found that an intelligent leader must be someone who can act as a human rights advocate. Comparing almost all-woman panchayat presidents, they believe that it is a very significant role of a woman leader to be a human rights advocate, especially at the local self-governance level. When it comes to the local self-governance, one of the significant challenges that the woman political leadership faces is the violence towards women and children and the exploitation of the depressed sections of the society. As a woman leader, another significant trait within the category of intelligence can be seen the participation in Gramasabha. Their participation and involvement in the Gramasabha enables them to raise their voices towards various social issues, which are concerned with the authority and trying to shape the orientation of other members, through which different positive and proactive mechanisms can be facilitated for various social, cultural activities and actions. Thus, the participation in the Gramasabha in the category of intelligence can be seen as one of the most determining aspects for the overall functioning of the administrative mechanisms in the local self-governance.

As part of intelligence, it was understood from the empirical study that an intelligent leader has to have negotiation skills as well, especially in the governance of the panchayat. In this study, the author has found that there are various cases where women leaders have to stop or re-think or make some changes in their planning if it was related to building houses for the poor, building some schools, other health facilities, or trying to close alcohol shops in their region, etc. In such a situation, as women leaders, the presidents are supposed to make negotiation plans with their regional party leaders or even with higher officials at the state level. Hence, this study shows that women leaders had to be negotiators to function in their region. In order to be an intelligent leader, having an objective character is important. From this study, the author has found that there were situations, in which women presidents were misunderstood or faced challenges. They were blamed for segregating certain groups, e.g., tribals or Tamils from their panchayat from getting certain financial benefits. However, the reality in such cases could be something

else, such as the lack of sufficient resources; women leaders are blamed for such incidences. Therefore, a leader must be objective and consider everyone's equality in their panchayat. If not, society may go against their leadership.

Another significant aspect in the category of intelligence can be seen in the power structure that was used. Various responsibilities and funding to various programs and projects have been allocated through the mechanism of power structures. Thus, being an efficient woman leader, power structure management can be seen as an effective mechanism for women's leadership to accomplish various societal well-being goals. Therefore, the aspect of power structure usage has a great significance in the intelligence trait, regarding woman leadership. It is as well a great responsibility of the Panchayat President to keep in touch with people, speak with them, and participate in the Grama Sabhas. Only, a political spectrum leader who works for the cause of human rights should address each person's problems, solve them, and guide them. Another significant aspect in the category of intelligence is the aspect of self-monitoring. As a woman leader, it is essential to have self-monitoring, thereby trying to see within themselves the required changes. The constant monitoring will enable them to perceive various social aspects that need changes and amendments. These are particularly significant for the district due to the vulnerability of the community to natural calamities. Moreover, due to the presence of various linguistic and other minority groups, the self-monitoring aspect enables them to differentiate, which aspects need to be changed and the significant changes that need to be taken into consideration.

Another significant aspect in the intelligence category is emotional intelligence. It has been seen as a considerable trait, through which leadership, especially women leaders, tried to see things rationally and objectively rather than taking it in a subjective aspect, thus influencing their emotional state into the administrative mechanisms. This is particularly evident when there are incidences of violence perpetrated against women and children. Rather than seeing from the subjective aspect of emotional vulnerability, women leaders should see it objectively, trying to provide decision-making rationality without falling into the emotional vulnerability. This is especially evident in the district when violence or rape towards women and children has been perpetuated. In those scenarios, rather than being vulnerable to the emotional aspect, woman leadership should see it in an expressive intelligence manner, thereby trying to provide justice without subjective inclination.

Another characteristic within the intelligence category is behavioral control. Similar to the aspects mentioned above, i.e., being rational and emotionally intelligent, behavior control as well has the exact alignment through the behavior control mechanism. The leadership will perceive things objectively, providing administrative assistance and ensuring fairness and transparency in those processes. Thus, through behavioral control, woman leadership facilitates proper administrative mechanisms without enabling or facilitating their emotional aspect in the administrative process. One of the significant aspects in modern times, especially regarding governance, is the proper management of the media mechanisms. There are various types of media mechanisms with a high level of media penetration.

Accurate and rational delivery of media mechanisms can lead to a varied perception of leadership in society and public. Therefore, women's leadership should be meticulous and considerate, regarding media management, especially at the highest authorities. Every vote that comes through the media mechanisms will have a bigger impact and proliferation in the society.

From the empirical study, the author has identified that an intelligent leader must be willing to take risks and face challenges during their governance. Especially in the case of the panchayat, which is deep inside the forest regions, there are several burglary cases or harmful practices, such as the cultivation of marijuana, etc. It is destroying the social order. In such cases, a leader has to risk destroying it and protecting forests and biodiversity, even though other higher leaders or organized wings may not be happy with the woman leader's decision. Therefore, an intelligent leader can have risk-taking characteristics as well. The final aspect in the category of intelligence can be seen as the radical mechanism. It is especially significant in the case of the Indian society, especially in the state of Kerala, as through the radical mechanisms, women leadership will be able to facilitate such mechanisms, which can make radical changes, thereby trying to change the societal approach, especially male superiority and stereotypes towards women empowerment and their leadership. In the case of the district, it has a great significance, as there should be some radical changes, especially when it comes to the aspect related to the tribal communities and vulnerable sections of the society, such as the minority communities, thereby trying to make significant changes and progress towards their social empowerment.

Table 11 shows the indicators of intelligence and examples from the elected women leaders on the role of each indicator, supporting governance at their panchayats.

Table 11. Intelligence contribution to the governance in panchayat

Indicators of intelligence	Examples
Verbal ability	"It also enables them to have the confidence to come forward to me with their grievances, thereby providing solutions to such grievances. Therefore, one of the significant qualities under the intelligence aspect is to have the verbal ability". (IP1, P3, K4, 2019)
Perceptual ability	"I believe that the political leadership, especially woman leadership should have the quality of perpetual ability, as it enables them to be transparent when it comes to the administrative process and also to perceive the negative traits in the administrative mechanism and the societal level, thereby trying to provide mechanisms to rectify such mechanisms. It will be able to ensure administrative efficiency, thereby providing relief to the deprived sections of society, especially during times of natural calamities". (IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Reasoning skill	"As a woman president in the Idukki district, which is very vulnerable due to the natural calamities and also the violence

	that is perpetrated towards woman and children and towards other ethnic and minority communities, reasoning is one of the significant quality traits I find in myself, as it enables me to distinguish between the truth and the reality from not being taken into my mindset. Thus, I feel that reasoning is one of the most significant aspects of the leadership position, especially regarding women political leadership". (IP9, P8, K 15, 2019)
Communication skills	"Grama Sabha meetings are a significant part of a panchayat administration. This is a meeting arranged by the panchayat to communicate directly with the members in each ward. We will organize these meetings at least once a month in each ward. In these meetings, all elected representatives and the ward member and people sit together and discuss the important facilities they need in their locality. We will as well identify if they have any social issues, like alcoholism, or lack of child welfare or facing poverty. We will find a solution and discuss the requirement of funds. Then, I will forward these reports to the concerned higher department and act as a mediator to get funds and support from the state government. Thus, I need to participate in such meetings by using communication skills that will give an immense opportunity to prove my leadership to a larger public. Therefore, I as the leader will be able to listen and understand my people's needs without any barriers and gain attention from higher authority to fulfill the citizens' needs appropriately without delay". Hence, to understand and communicate with citizens, without any limitations and with clarity on both sides, a leader must have good communication with its people". (IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Higher IQ	"I see the importance of having good knowledge and IQ as a significant aspect, especially towards women; with the managerial autonomy, I was able to allocate funds equitably and especially during the times of natural calamities, it enables me to allocate the funds without needing to have consultations, thereby having to wait for a long time to allocate the funds. Thus, I believe that IQ ability is of great significance when it comes to the woman's political leadership at the panchayat level". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)
Problem-solving skills	"I believe that the problem-solving skill within the intelligence category has a great significance, as through performance quality, the leadership will be able to evaluate their performances and get feedback regarding those performances. Through such a mechanism, they will understand how and at what level they are standing and try to rectify if some significant changes are required. They will be able to rectify such mechanisms through such a

	mechanism without being remotely away from the political leadership position during the next electoral mechanisms. Thus, I believe that problem-solving quality can be seen as a great evaluating mechanism, through which leadership will get to know about their qualities and skills". (IP23, P6, K10, 2019)
Social judgment skills	"As a newcomer into political leadership at LSG, in the beginning, it was a bit of a challenge for me to understand and implement certain policies, like housing facility or allocating funds to the wards in the panchayat, but my constant strives for attaining success through various suggestions and discussion with other leaders and making good judgment helped me to be a strong leader during these years". (IP2, P14, K15, 2019)
Constant activism	"I believe that it is important for me to communicate and listen to the problems of my people in the panchayat and update with the ward representatives to help and assist their needs without any delay. Otherwise, people will think that I am not a strong leader. Therefore, such constant activism in a panchayat is important to be a good leader at my place". (IP1, P3, K4, 2019)
Value-oriented	"As coming from a political party with a great reputation of being value-oriented in its political ideologies, I always cherish and follow the ideological orientation of the political party that I belong to. Therefore, when it comes to the political decision-making and administrative mechanisms and the aspect of hearing the grievances of the public in this society, I always consider value orientation as a significant prerequisite to be an efficient political leader". (IP21, P6, K10, 2019)
Knowledge and awareness	"As of now, I understood that I must be aware of various legal procedures and mandates while implementing various projects. Without a strong background of knowledge and information on certain policies, I will not successfully evaluate or implement developmental policies. It is significant for me, as a leader, to be intelligent while making any decisions at the panchayat. If not, the society and other people around me will later criticize my action, which could challenge the confidence of leadership". (IP3, P7, K10, 2019)
Human rights advocate	"I believe that human rights advocacy by a woman's political leadership is a significant criterion for local self-governance, and I always uphold when it comes to the administrative decision-making to be an active and vocal human rights advocate". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)
Participation in Gramasabha	"I believe that as a woman president, one of the prerequisites for successful political leadership at the local self-

	governance is the participation in the Grama Sabha. Through this participation, women leaders will understand the needs of the public, especially their grievances, and convey to the public the policies and welfare mechanisms, initiated and implemented at the local self-governance. Therefore, as a panchayat president, I always find it a significant aspect regarding the participation in the Grama Sabha, as the participation in such meetings enabled to get connected with the public at large".
	(IP20, P4, K11, 2019)
Negotiation	"I believe that it is through the negotiation process that most of the administrative and bureaucratic mechanisms will be able to be carried out in the local self-governance. This is mostly due to the differences of opinion from various leadership positions, especially of different political parties. Moreover, the adamant stand, taken by the main political representatives, can be seen as a determining factor regarding this. Therefore, when it comes to the decision-making, as a woman president, I always take a stand in negotiation or negotiation mechanisms, thereby dealing with diversified political opinions and reaching a consensus, trying to implement the political decision-making at the local self-governance level".
	(IP24, P3, K0, 2019)
Objective	"In my experience, if you are a leader, people always expect you to do many activities, especially provide various services, like water facility, protection, helping them to make houses, prevention of violence, and protect their rights without any discrimination. Therefore, it is always necessary for me to be vital and willing to take the risk if needed. Then, only people will accept me as a strong leader who can lead the panchayat".
	(IP4, P16, K10, 2019)
Power structure uses	"As a woman president, I believe that power structure uses or its significance greatly impact Panchayati Raj Institutions. This is especially significant when it comes to allocating various funds for various developmental policies and projects. Through the power structure mechanism, the panchayat president will be able to allocate the funding credibly, thereby enhancing and ensuring equality in the administrative mechanism".
	(IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Self-monitoring	"As a woman political leader and president, I make sure that I always have quality when it comes to the aspect of self-monitoring. This is especially true concerning the aspect of leadership to various changes in administrative mechanisms and technological development. Thus, I believe that proper self-monitoring will enable you to enhance your skills and expertise and come up with the real-world scenarios, thereby

	trying to be an active and efficient woman panchayat president".
	(IP1, P3, K4, 2019)
Emotional intelligence	"I perceive emotional intelligence as one of the significant character traits, as it is through the emotional intelligence, I was able to differentiate the things without getting attached to the subjective orientation. I find these things especially challenging when I must visit people who have been sexually exploited, especially woman and children, when there have been issues, when there has been violence perpetrated towards ethnic and other linguistic minorities. During those times, rather than seeing it subjectively due to the emotional intelligence, I was able to perceive it objectively, thereby trying to provide justice without any personal prejudice". (IP9, P8, K 15, 2019)
Behavioral control	"As a Panchayat president, in the beginning, I found it very challenging to have behavioral control, especially when it comes to encountering issues perpetuated towards woman and children. But later, I realized that to be an efficient political leader, particularly as a woman panchayat president, the quality of having behavioral control is very significant. Therefore, throughout the time, I developed the quality of behavioral control, through which I was able to see things objectively without having involved myself into those things personally". (IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Media management	"I believe that one of the most impactful mechanisms to reach out to the public and hear their grievances and provide solutions is the media mechanism, through which it makes the highest penetration into the society. I considered the media mechanism a channeling force for the governance that will be reached out to the public, and their grievances have been channelized back to the administrative mechanisms. Therefore, as a woman president, I always rely on the media mechanisms to outreach to the wider audience". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)
Risk-taker	"As a woman president, especially from the Idukki district, I believe that the aspect of risk-taking has a significant impact when it comes to the woman's political leadership. This is especially true for the policy decisions taken during natural calamities, as drastic decision-making is required during such times of natural calamities. From my experience, even though many diverse opinions come during natural calamities, I rely on my decisions and go with such intuitive mechanisms, thereby taking the risk in decision-making. Thus, I believe that when it comes to the aspect of decision-making, risk-taking is one of the significant quality traits, which the woman leadership should develop, thereby trying

	to take effective mechanisms during such scenarios".
	(IP23, P6, K10, 2019)
Radical	"As a woman president in the Idukki district, I believe that radical measures are sometimes needed for societal changes. This is especially true when there are incidences where violence and other activities are perpetrated towards the deprived sections of society. My colleagues and I tried to implement such policy measures as an emergency mechanism through radical mechanisms, thereby rectifying such scenarios and maintaining societal stability. Therefore, as a woman president, I believe that radical changes are significantly needed, especially to change the mindset of the society towards women children and different systems of society".
	(IP25, P11, K10, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Self-confidence

In order to identify if the elected women representatives possess self-confidence as a leadership trait, this research uses the given question: how confidence contributes to the participation in politics. Thus, to analyze it, the author is using a list of indicators associated with confidence, determining if the elected women representatives at the panchayat can use their skills as listed for the successful participation in politics at their corresponding panchayats, as shown in Table 12.

According to Northouse (2013), the self-confidence of a leader is another important part of leadership. He says that the leader's self-confidence includes features such as a sense of self-esteem, self-assurance, the belief that one can make a difference and influence others.

However, according to the empirical findings, women leaders at the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute other important self-confidence indicators, such as behavior in public, openness to the experiences, administrative knowledge, public speaking ability, motivational character, situational approach, and regulative character.

Nowadays, it is vital to have the confidence in order to carry out the responsibilities for any leader in politics. A leader needs to understand the tasks, duties, and responsibilities and how they can be carried out. As leaders, they should have confidence in their personality and inspire others. Another important mechanism in the category of confidence is self-esteem. The self-esteem mechanism enables the leadership to embrace changes and motivate them to work with the public, thereby making significant changes in their social and political lives. The women presidents from the district state that one of the most significant aspects for them is the mentality and self-esteem, which enables them to come out of their household, thereby trying to experiment with the political leadership and be in politics, facilitate changes and become the actor, which facilitates changes for women and girl communities in the society. Thus, from these experiences, self-

esteem is one of the most significant aspects of leadership, especially women's leadership, for their overall political and social empowerment.

Another significant aspect in the category of confidence is self-assurance. One of the crucial qualities of leadership is the self-assurance aspect, which enables them to be conscious of their abilities and weaknesses, thereby trying to make significant improvements to overcome their weaknesses and enhance their strength, trying to be productive for the well-being of the society. Women presidents from the district state that while entering the political leadership, they were self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and through various programs and policies of this local self-government, they were able to overcome their weaknesses and convert those weaknesses in the district, thereby trying to be productive for the overall well-being of the society and act as responsible social actors. Another important indicator of self-confidence of a leader is their ability to make a difference. The conducted study revealed that most of the elected women panchayat presidents were able to make a huge change in their panchayat, especially in terms of eradicating poverty, increasing protection of women and girls from rape, violence, sexual abuses, etc., and increasing the water facilities in regions where it was not possible to drill the soil due to the fear of land erosion. Therefore, women leaders significantly implement positive changes during their leadership.

The influencing of others is another indicator of self-confidence of a leader. If a leader can engage everyone equally and accurately analyze the statements of different parties and formulate a policy without becoming a leader who imposes their decisions on other people, then, of course, it is their influence. Therefore, even if women leaders can use their influence and work together to create a better society, the people's approval is very important. It could be seen that the personality or charisma of a person has a significant role in influencing others and formulating their perceptions. It can be observed that the highest approval rate, regarding influence or charisma, can be attributed to the male representatives due to their words, actions, and other mechanisms through which they try to propagate their charisma. What concerns women representatives, the female representatives as well have a significant role in propagating their charisma, especially at the local self-government level, mainly by the women presidents. However, when it comes to the ward representatives, they tend to have less charisma or influential capacity due to their lesser positions and domination by the male members within the group. However, even though the women representatives unanimously state that they have more influential capacity in the political decision-making at the LSG level, but when it comes to the political parties, they feel that they seem to have lesser influential charismatic personality, since they have been selected and handpicked by the political parties and political mentors. Therefore, it did not seem to show a more significant influence or charismatic impact on the political parties and their political leaders.

A leader's behavior in a public space is considered as another indicator of self-confidence. Especially in this study, most of the women leaders who do not have over 10 years of working experience in politics said that in the beginning, they were not confident enough to make a speech for a larger public. Still, within 6–7 months

of their leadership, they were able to gain confidence, because society is keen on observing the leaders. If they do not look confident enough in the public's eyes, it will lead to a difference in opinions, especially since the society is patriarchal. Therefore, women leaders in this study consider their public appearance as an important part of their self-confidence in participating in political activities at their panchayats.

Another significant aspect in the category of self-confidence is openness to the experiences. The openness to experience can be seen as a mechanism through which leadership should embrace such mechanisms, which will create openness to experiences, thereby trying new measures to facilitate administrative and bureaucratic efficiency and transparency. Regarding political leadership, one of the most significant activities towards embracing openness to experiences is woman leadership due to their innovative mechanisms and multitasking abilities. In the district's case, women leadership, especially women presidents, state that they always welcome and embrace openness to experiences, thereby trying new innovative mechanisms that can be cost-effective and create more administrative and bureaucratic transparency.

Administrative knowledge of a leader is another important indicator of self-confidence. In this study, few leaders did not have a higher education. Therefore, it was important for them to learn and understand various legal provisions, get training from the Kerala Institute of Local Administration on panchayat administration, their duties, and responsibilities, and protect developmental reports' privacy. Moreover, they had to have a deep understanding of various projects implemented by the state government and monitor and follow up on them. Hence, a leader must have an in-depth understanding of various administrative practices at their panchayat. As part of a leader's self-confidence, the author has identified that making a public speech is associated with self-confidence. Since most women leaders came from various education, financial, and social backgrounds, including the difference in language, they had to be sure and confident in facing the panchayat presidents. As in the Idukki district, there are various places where women are treated not equally or do not get much respect from men while facing such a group, a woman leader must be strong and confident enough to speak with them. Moreover, they had to be authoritative as well.

It has been found from the empirical study that a confident leader has motivational character. Most leaders have said that it is very important for them to participate in motivating society actively. Especially when it comes to certain natural calamities, they need the support from the society to be a volunteer, help others, and provide food and shelter for people. Therefore, a leader can motivate society to engage citizens in their panchayat to have strong administration actively. Hence, a leader must have the motivational characteristic feature as well. Another significant aspect in the category of confidence is the situational approach. It can be seen as an effective mechanism, through which the leadership, especially the woman leadership, takes decisions that will be rational and facilitate governance, according to the situational needs of the time. Such mechanisms ensure that the governance of decision-making will be appropriate and suitable for the situational needs of the time

and the place. This is especially significant for the district. Due to various environmental scenarios and natural calamities, the situational approach has a great significance, as the decisions taken at the appropriate time and place matter a lot when it comes to the natural calamities. In terms of confidence, it is crucial to have self-awareness and regulation.

Another significant aspect in the category of confidence is the regulative character. It can be seen as an effective mechanism through which the leadership, especially woman leadership, takes decisions that will be rational and facilitate governance, according to the situational needs of the time. Such mechanisms ensure that the governance of decision-making will be appropriate and suitable for the situational needs of the time and the place. This is especially significant for the district. Due to various environmental scenarios and natural calamities, the situational approach has a great significance as the decisions taken at the appropriate time and place matter a lot when it comes to the natural calamities. In terms of confidence, it is crucial to have a regulative character.

Table 12 shows the indicators of self-confidence and examples of the elected women leaders on the role of each indicator's contribution to the participation in politics at the panchayats.

Table 12. Self-confidence contribution to the participation in politics at panchayat

Indicators of self-confidence	Examples
Self-esteem	"I believe that one of the significant requirements in the confidence category is keeping the self-esteem, especially concerning women political leaders. Even though there are various mechanisms in the society that facilitate one political leadership, the reality is that when it comes to the moments of political participation, one of the significant factors is self-esteem, which can act as a catalyst for women to come forward to the political leadership positions. Regarding my case, my motivation facilitated me to channelize and connect with the political leadership, thereby stating my aspiration to be in the women political leadership. Through such process, they understood my mindset and enabled me to contact the election and get elected as a woman president". (IP24, P3, K0, 2019)
Self-assurance	"I believe that as a woman president, one of the significant aspects in the confidence category is self-assurance. A leader can distinguish what good qualities they have and what bad qualities they pose within themselves through self-assurance. Through the process of self-assurance, I understood the negative traits within myself. I took measures to eliminate such negative traits and enhance Maple city Trade Center to convert those negative traits into positive traits. Through such a self-assurance process, I enhanced my skills, qualities, and expertise, which I now have. Thus, I believe that the aspect of self-assurance is of a great significance when it comes to the women's political leadership and orienting them to be a successful leader". (IP20, P4, K11, 2019)

Making differences	"I was active in various social service events and programs conducted by Kudumbashree for making a progressive difference in society. With my church organizations, I am as well trying my best to make an impact in society. However, my experience in politics was not that significant; thus, in the beginning, it was a bit confusing for me to adapt to the reality of politics and its style. When there were many political parties and corresponding leaders, mostly male, it was tough for me to sit with men and raise my voice in the discussion, since we have the stigma that males must talk, not women. But later, I understood the format and decided to be strict and balance speaking in discussions with confidence. Then, the male colleagues started to agree with my opinions. Thus, I agree that to engage fully in leadership as a woman, we must be confident in many ways". (IP9, P8, K 15, 2019)
Influencing others	"As a woman leader, I believe that intentional practice to influence others and influence society has a great significant impact on the decision-making process. Through such intentional practices, the administrative machinery tries to implement policy mechanisms that have already been formulated priorly and implemented in a planned manner. Unlike the accidental policy mechanisms, the intentional policy mechanism will enable the administrative machinery to implement those policy mechanisms without rectification, as it is already planned priorly in a proper manner. I always try to make decisions at the panchayat level intentionally rather than in an accidental manner. As a woman leader, I believe that there should be a proper plan for the decision-making process, and it should be formulated priorly and implemented in an intentional manner". (IP23, P6, K10, 2019)
Behavior in public	"During my initial times in the political level, I found it very challenging to behave in the public, especially during meetings and public proceedings. But throughout the time, with proper training and perceptions, I tried to enhance my skills and confidence towards behavior in public, which enabled me to behave with confidence in public meetings and discussions and deliberation with other political actors and the society at large. That is why I believe that confidence has a great significance in formulating and molding women presidents' behavior at the public". (IP25, P11, K10, 2019)
Openness to experiences	"As a president of my panchayat, I am aware that many things are new to me, since I do not have huge experience in politics. Therefore, as a president in this diverse society, I must always be open to experiences and new innovative mechanisms. One of the significant aspects is the introduction of new innovative mechanisms at the local self-governance, like social media mechanisms, through which the public can connect with me and report their grievances and various mad practices in this society, especially when it comes to the administrative mechanisms. Through such a process, I learned about the real scenarios to the public after facing society and taking measures to get rid of such scenarios. Thus, I believe that openness to ideas and experiences have a

	great role when it comes to the administrative mechanisms and enhancing the administrative efficiency". (IP20, P4, K11, 2019)
Administrative knowledge	"As you know, in this district, we are facing various natural calamities time to time; thus, as the president of this panchayat, I need to take care of my people and the family. Therefore, I am aware that I must know the administrative tasks and improve society's welfare. First, I need to prepare myself and have confidence in many aspects; only then, I will be able to act quickly if some emergency occurs. If I do not have confidence in doing that, I will not be a good leader. In that case, society will lose trust in my leadership, and maybe, they will not accept my leadership in the next election. Hence, as a leader, I must be very confident in my actions". (IP6, P9, K 10, 2019)
Public speech	"I do not have much higher education or degree certificates. Thus, it is sometimes difficult for me to understand various documents issued by the state government in English. This has become a little bit challenging for me, sometimes. But, I have good colleagues who assist me in translation, and then, we gather and evaluate the documents. Hence, I believe that if I had more technical skills, especially in terms of computer usage and translation of governmental documents, I think it would be an added advantage to increase my confidence. As a leader, there are many times in which I need to make a speech in front of many people, in schools, colleges, religious, or political gatherings, when meeting with higher officials, etc., and in such cases, if I am unable to make a speech with confidence, courage, and clarity, it will affect my overall image in the society. Therefore, public speech capacity is as well one of the important parts that has to be an integral part of my leadership". (IP7, P15, K15, 2019)
Motivational character	"In my panchayat, there is Tamil community, who are laborers in the tea plantation. Since I speak Malayalam, they sometimes cannot understand my communication completely. We have made Tamil documents and a new project application or inviting fund requests from them in Tamil. This change has drastically increased my acceptance among Tamil people, and they are glad to listen to me. Thus, I strongly believe that it is essential for a leader to include everyone as equal to the community and engage with them, which will improve my acceptability among them and increases my confidence". (IP8, P5, K 8, 2019)
Situational approach	"I believe that situational approach has a great significance when it comes to the administrative mechanisms and taking decisions appropriately. In my case, I believe that the situational approach had a great impact, especially when it comes to the natural calamities. I tried to stay calm during such incidents and take decisions that could aid quickly. Thus, I believe that situational approach is one of the most significant aspects of leadership decision-making, especially in a place that is vulnerable to natural calamities all year round". (IP13, P4, K 10, 2019)

Regulative character	"Even though the PRI policy has increased women's political participation, sometimes, I felt certain comments from the public or even male colleagues that women would not be in a power seats if there was no PRI. Though this is true in certain ways, such comments or shame will drastically affect women's representatives. Therefore, I always try to be strong and aware of my actions and appearance in public to avoid any misconceptions".
	(IP10, P10, K 14, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Determination

In order to identify if the elected women representatives possess determination as a leadership trait, this research uses question how determination contributes to the decision-making at the LSG, and analyzes the indicators associated with determination. Thus, the author is using a list of indicators associated with determination and determining if the elected women representatives at the panchayat can use their skills as listed for strong decision-making at their corresponding panchayats.

According to Northouse (2013), the determination of a leader is another important part of leadership. He says that the leader's determination includes features such as initiative, persistence, dominance, proactive, and the capacity to persevere in the face of obstacles. However, according to the empirical findings, the author has found that women leaders at the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute some other important key determination features, such as constant social presence, dependency, empathy, compassion, violence prevention, Kudumbashree membership, education, party support, affiliation to party, usage of the online platform, and religious organizational activism, all of which are very important indicators for a woman leader at the panchayat for being a strong decision-maker in their panchayat.

Determination is another important leadership trait. Therefore, in terms of the determination ability of leaders, there are various indicators associated with it, especially to contribute to the decision-making at the panchayat. In order to have strong determination ability, a leader must possess the feature of taking the initiative in the panchayat. In this study, the author has found various cases where the president has to take strong initiatives to develop their region. Sometimes, a leader may not be getting sufficient attention. All of them face challenges from different political party leaders or party representatives in terms of implementing the initiatives. It may be because as one of the women leaders mentioned, other political party leaders who are men might not be happy or accept woman leader's terms and conditions. In such scenarios, a woman leader has to be very strong and make the policies available equally to society without changing their plans and actions, but rather protecting the interests of the society at the panchayat.

Another indicator of determination is the persistence of a leader. Another significant aspect in the determination category is dependency. This part as well has a significant attribute, as being a leader does not mean that they are independent and

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always outside the societal influence. Dependency can be seen as a characteristic trait that shows no weaknesses. Still, the strength of a woman president or a leader is that they depend on others, especially within the political realm or the societal realm, thereby trying to get assistance from others or in a collaborative manner trying to facilitate discourses and create solutions for the problems with the coordination and collaboration with others. This can be seen particularly while collaborating with various sections of the society, especially during the times of communal unrest or during the times of natural calamities when trying to get assistance from the other sections of the society. Even a proper understanding and compassionate nature within the family, especially the support of parents and husband, when they are outside for long hours or days helping others, will be of great significance. Thus, dependency can be seen as a significant positive trait in the category of determination. Most women presidents state that dependency as a characteristic trait has positive benefits within the case study district. They cherish those aspects, especially when they get assistance from their parents or family members and other parts of the society, thereby trying to be a collective force to fight against the evils or trusting the society to which they were trying to bring social justice.

Another significant aspect within the determination category is the dominance part. The participation and engagement of women leaders in dominances enabled them to understand the pulse of the society and various scenarios, which need urgent attention. In the case study district, a woman president states that the dominances enable them to understand the real scenarios, which are happening in the society and concerning women and children, especially the cases where there the violence is perpetrated towards women and sexual exploitation. Most of these grievances were unheard because of the lack of public attention. The media constantly shows interest in those incidences that are very interesting in their narratives and align with their political ideologies. However, the needs of the depressed and vulnerable sections of the society are unheard in the public attention. Thus, dominances and meetings enable and facilitate both the presidents and leaders to understand the needs of those parts of society, which were usually not heard in the regular discourses.

Another significant aspect of determination is the proactiveness of the leader. As it will enhance the leader's role in facilitating the decision-making at the local self-governance of the women presidents, the variables mentioned above have a significant impact. One of the most incredible things for a leader who works for the community's efficient service is to partner with social commitment, i.e., to make sure that everyone in the community is approachable. Only a friendly person who speaks and encourages proactiveness can be an excellent political leader. Another significant characteristic trait is the perseverance of a leader within the determination category. It can be seen that when it comes to women leaders or presidents, the perseverance characteristics have a great significance due to the feminine nature and the humanitarian and compassionate approach of women leaders that tried to be protective and compassionate towards various societal needs, especially those who are depressed and other classes, thereby trying to provide protection, get rid of the societal evils, and provide welfare.

Constant social presence is another important indicator of the determination of leadership. Through such presence and public discussion mechanisms, they ensure that they were constantly connected to society, thereby trying to get rid of the grievances of the society at large. Thus, through these determination mechanisms, the society and public have confidence in women Presidents and their decision-making abilities, thereby aligning to their ideas and trying to implement them at the societal level, ensuring peace and stability in society's democratic process. According to the empirical study, the author has found that the dependency on others, especially responsible party members and authority, can as well be considered an important feature of a leader's determination, especially at the panchayat level. Most of women leaders said that there were many incidences where they have been pushed away in certain meetings carried out at the state level for panchayat presidents, since they are from Idukki, may not be rich, have less awareness of new technologies, or do not have a higher education. However, they were very much determined to discuss their panchayat's issues with such a large audience, especially about their panchayat. Hence, when it is necessary, a leader has to ask for help or depend on others, which is as well a part of determination in fulfilling their duties without any delay.

One of the significant characteristic traits that come into the determination part is empathy or understanding others' feelings and being compassionate. As a woman president, being empathetic enables the leader to understand those who are vulnerable in society, especially women and children and the depressed classes. Thus, showing empathetic nature can be seen as one of the significant traits in the determination category. Regarding the case study district and women presidents in the majority of states that have a woman leader, the characteristic trait of empathy is embedded chiefly within them, which enabled them to show compassionate attitude towards others, especially the vulnerable sections of society. Other characteristic traits, such as empathy, compassion, have a significant part in the determination category. Being compassionate enabled them to understand the feelings, thereby making significant changes in the life and well-being of those who depended on the political leadership of the women presidents and other leaders. Therefore, being compassionate can be seen as a significant human trait, and for women presidents, it can be seen as a genuine human character of the feminine nature. With the case study district, a woman president states that it is primarily a feminine nature to be compassionate and humane; thus, they always show these compassionate approaches, especially when it comes to the needs of woman and children and vulnerable sections of society, especially when there are incidences such as natural calamities, when a compassionate approach and humanitarian stand are needed.

Another significant characteristic trait within the determination category is violence prevention. During situations, such as communal riots and religious untrust, violent undertakings happen in a society. This is especially evident during natural calamities when people resort to violent mechanisms due to the lack of resources, thereby grabbing resources. Moreover, violent scenarios happen when violent incidences are perpetrated physically and sexually against women and children and vulnerable sections of society. Therefore, the prevention of violence can be seen as

one of the significant aspects of women presidents and other leaders in this society. In the case study district, most of women presidents state that violence prevention is one of the most significant duties and one of the significant and challenging tasks which they undertake, primarily due to the nature of the society in which violence is perpetrated mostly during the standard times against women and children and during the times of natural calamities and religious unrest against the deeper sections of society.

As a part of determination in this study, most leaders as well acknowledge that their experience in the Kudumbashree organization as a member initially and later as a president or vice-president or secretary had helped them be successful leaders in their panchayat. Most of them said that they were simple housewives before coming into the politics, but they were active in Kudumbashree. Hence, due to their leadership at the Kudumbashree, other women members suggested becoming a candidate in the election, and they won and became presidents. In their Kudumbashree meetings, they discuss individual projects, entrepreneurship, starting a small-scale business, etc., thereby enhancing their skills and organizational capacity. Thus, in this study, the participation of the selected women leaders in Kudumbashree enabled them to be determined in their leadership at the panchayat.

Education can be seen as one of the most significant characteristic traits within the determination category. Through the mechanism of education, it imparts knowledge and other qualities and abilities in the women presidents and other leaders. Education enables them to be more open and have openness towards various approaches and take new measures, through which various societal problems can be resolved. With the case study district, most of the women presidents state that they find education one of the most meaningful aspects when it comes to the leadership position, as education enables them to have a broad-minded approach towards various societal needs, thereby trying to create solutions to various problems in the society.

Another significant characteristic trait in the determination category is party support. It is one of the most decisive factors for leadership positions, especially women presidents and other party members. The proper support of the party that they represent enables them to have a foothold in the social realm and take strong measures to benefit the welfare of various sections of the society, especially the vulnerable and weaker sections. In the case study district, most women presidents state that the party support that they feel is an essentially significant trait that enables them to work appropriately without fear and favor.

Another significant characteristic trait in the determination category is affiliation to a party. Even though the presidents got selected through the party affiliations, most of the candidates or women presidents belong to various political parties and are represented on the party ticket, and they became presidents by the political parties' nominations. Therefore, being a member of the party or affiliation to a political party seems to be one of the significant traits when it comes to the selection of women representatives to various political positions. Regarding the selected district, most of women presidents state that they belong to various political parties, and they feel that the affiliation to the political party is one of the significant

scenarios, which enabled them to develop themselves and become active members of the society and provide to various societal problems.

In terms of determination of leadership, another indicator is the usage and awareness of online platforms, and the digitalization seems to be relevant for women to have leadership skills, especially in this study. Most of women leaders have said that in the 21st century, panchayats must use online platforms to spread their actions and words among society to gain attention to their policies or get additional support. They as well agree that they can use social media and other online platforms to communicate with their panchayat residents, updating them with the activities and projects they are implementing in their panchayats. However, they as well mentioned that cybercrimes or online abuses against women leaders are increasing.

Another significant characteristic trait in the determination category is religious organizational activism or affiliation. What concerns the selected district, most of women presidents state that being a member of a religious organization and party affiliation and membership proves them significant opportunities through these organizations. They come into close contact with various needs of the community and organizational groups. Similar to the political party affiliations, religious organizational activism and membership as well prove to be very decisive, especially regarding women's leadership positions. Through the religious organization's activism and membership, they connect with various community members, thereby understanding the community's needs, which enabled them to facilitate policies and programs for the welfare and betterment of those communities. Moreover, being a member of a religious organization, they can get connected to other religious organizations through various religious organizational programs, which help to understand the needs of the affiliations and, to an extent, the broader societal needs, because most of the people belong to various religious organizations, especially in the state of Kerala.

Table 13 shows the indicators of determination and examples of the elected women leaders on the role of each indicator's contribution to the decision-making at the panchayat.

Table 13. Determination contribution to the decision-making at the panchayat

Indicators of Determination	Examples
Initiative	"I have been a social worker and a nursery teacher for over 25 years. In this panchayat, violence against women, girls, and older adults is very high. The main reason is alcoholism. Drug addiction is widespread as well. Due to these reasons, many women got injured. In order to prevent these tortures, I decided to create an important initiative to create Pakalveedu system. Our panchayat provides care, nursing assistance, food for the morning, lunch, and evening snacks. We take care of the young kids as well, and once their parents return from work, we will send them back home with their parents. There were many policies to prevent violence against women and girls. Hence, under my leadership, we created this special care home, and I was determined to do it with my colleagues and other members' help.

	However, in most cases, it is not helping in practice. Therefore, a leader must be empathetic and make societal changes as a strong leader by using their power in the panchayat in implementing new initiatives". (IP3, P7, K10, 2019)
Persistence	"I believe that dependency on other leaders or people is not a weakness, especially when it is important to get support. Therefore, to fulfill the responsibilities properly in a panchayat, leaders must be persistent in their views. Furthermore, it can be seen as a strength in collaboration and depending on others, especially in the aspect of political leadership. Many perceive the aspect of dependency as a weakness. Still, I believe that it is not only for the women political leaders, I can see those men political leaders who as well rely on dependency when needed. During natural calamities, I rely on my colleagues, especially the male political members, and other ward members, and try to combine ideas in such scenarios. Moreover, during that time, I relied on the dependency on my family members, especially spouse, to understand the situation, thereby enabling me to overcome such hurdles and provide relief to the public who are suffering during such scenarios. I felt delighted that the male representatives as well depended on other female political leaders and me during that time, thereby showing that dependency can be seen as a strength rather than a weakness". (IP1, P3, K4, 2019)
Dominance	"As a woman panchayat president, I believe that one of the most significant requirements for a president is to participate in public discussions and make sure that I have the authority and can make remarks on various projects, thereby showing my power and dominance. Through public discussions, the leadership will learn about the society's scenarios and provide solutions to such scenarios. I always participate in public discussions, interact with the public, and understand their grievances to formulate policies and mechanisms to alleviate them. Thus, I believe that the public discussions have a significant role in the aspect of governance at the local self-governance". (IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Proactive	"As a woman leader and president of the panchayat, I always make sure that I make the necessary social contact and presence when it is needed for a proactive approach. These are mostly during natural calamities, communal violence, and incidences of exploitation and harassment towards women. I make my social presence as I go to those places and try to communicate with the people who have been deprived of their rights and affected by such scenarios. Thus, with those mechanisms, I try to make sure that I get connected to those people who were being affected and try to provide remedies and solutions to such scenarios. Therefore, I believe that to be an efficient political leader, one should always have a social presence and try to see the things they needs to see in a realistic form rather than trying to formulate ideas by perceiving those incidences from a third source". (IP10, P10, K 14, 2019)
Perseverance	"As a woman leader, I always try to be protective towards the most

	vulnerable sections of the society, like women, minorities, and children. When this happen, incidences like sexual violence against women and children, I try to intervene in those scenarios and provide justice, protecting the victims. Moreover, I try to protect them from the mass media that can further damage their personalities thereby making them a disgrace in front of society. This is a feminine quality. I always try to be protective towards the vulnerable sections of society, like women and children. Various projects for their protection need more support from other committee members, especially in terms of fund allocation. Therefore, I always try to be very strong and perseverant. Otherwise, such projects may not get approval". (IP14, P25, K15, 2019)
Constant social presence	"We are like film stars some time, especially since I am a woman, and a woman president of the panchayat; thus, everyone is watching us and our actions. In order to increase the social presence and gain support from society, we, female presidents, must be at the forefront of all activities organized by the panchayat. If you do not have strong willpower and determination, no matter what backing from male colleagues or men from the public you have, you cannot be a strong leader. Hence, I always try to be determined to carry out my aims with sincerity". (IP11, P7, K 5, 2019)
Dependency	"We were facing attacks from wild animals, especially the farmers. Thus, I was determined to get proper attention and support for my people on a large platform. Hence, as women leaders, we must be following our values and agendas without any hesitation. Only a strong leader can do such activities". (IP12, P6, K11, 2019)
Empathetic	"I think that being empathetic can be seen as a significant character trait of political leadership, and being a woman, I feel that it is one of the feminine qualities to be empathetic, especially towards people who were sufferings. Regarding the district, which is vulnerable to various natural calamities and other social-cultural scenarios, I feel that being empathetic enables me to understand those scenarios and communicate with the people suffering from such incidences, thereby providing solutions to those communities. Thus, when it comes to the aspect of grievances, I always hear it in an empathetic manner and try to provide solutions to the different sections of the society". (IP13, P4, K 10, 2019)
Compassionate	"As a woman political leader, I always show the aspect of compassion and empathy when it comes to the administration and hearing the grievances of the public. This is especially significant in incidences like violence against women and natural calamities that happen in the district. As a woman leader, I always take a compassionate approach, connecting with the people, hearing their grievances, and providing solutions. Thus, I believe that through compassion particularly, I will enable to get connected with the public at large by trying to provide solutions to the issues they are facing". (IP19, P6, K10, 2019)

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Violence prevention	"Being a leader, especially the president of the local self-governance at the panchayat level, even though I faced various challenges regarding the administrative mechanisms and implementation of policies, the most challenging aspect at the local self-government is violence prevention. This is especially critical and crucial during communal issues when violence erupts in society, and it is very hard to contain. Even though I tried to secure assistance from the public, the law and administrative bodies, like the police, it is a very hard and challenging task to contain communal violence due to the diversity of society and public. In such scenarios, we were restored to the aspect of force through policy mechanisms. The administration as well resorted policy mechanisms, such as deliberations and discussions with the communal leaders, thereby diluting such scenarios and eliminating communal violence. Thus, as a Panchayat president, I can state that one of the most significant challenging aspects in the administrative mechanisms, especially in this district, is the containment of violence, especially the communal violence in this society". (IP22, P7, K10, 2019)
Kudumbashree membership	"I got certain experiences in administration from Kudumbashree. I strongly believe that such organizational experiences gave me more motivation and a platform to realize my strengths as a leader. As a president, I believe that those skills are helping me to carry out the policies at the panchayat and encourage me to be determined to fulfill the tasks without hesitation or tiredness". (IP13, P4, K 10, 2019)
Education	"Even though I was educated but remained as a housewife, I thought that there was no use of getting educated because I could not work with my education. But when I came to the political level and was selected as the panchayat president, I understood the significance of being educated. Due to my education, I understood and evaluated various policy mechanisms and drafts and provided my insights regarding policy decision-making and deliberations. Therefore, being educated is one of the most significant quality traits to be an effective leader, participate in the decision-making process, and see things more objectively and rationally rather than being in a subjective orientation and inclination. Thus, I believe that education plays a significant role in molding and formulating political leadership, especially regarding the aspect of women's political leadership". (IP20, P4, K11, 2019)
Party support	"As a woman leader who has been represented by the political party and nominated by the party for getting elected to the president's post, I believe that the support of the party is very crucial, irrespective whether it is a male or female for their particular positions and participation at the political level. Even though there are people who contest and win the election outside of party support or irrespective of the parties, but I believe that the affiliation by the party has a great significance, especially in getting the support of the other members and the governance level who have the same affiliations, as it enables you to get the support of members who have similar party affiliations, thereby

	getting the support of the majority to implement those policy measures and mechanisms, which you incline towards. Thus, I believe that being a member of the political party and party support can be seen as a crucial factor for the overall development of the political leadership, especially when it comes to the woman's political leadership".
	(IP25, P11, K10, 2019)
Affiliation to party	"As being a member of the political party, I was selected to participate in the election, and being selected as the woman president, I believe that party affiliation places a significant role when it comes to the selection of woman to significant posts at the local self-governance. My family was for a long time affiliated with the political party. Because of the affiliation, I as well became inclined towards the party's political ideologies, through which I got represented. I always believed that the affiliation to the party and allegiance to its particular idea are crucial factors for selecting the respective positions at the local self-governance. Therefore, I believe that the affiliation to the party can be seen as a most significant prerequisite for women to come forward to the political leadership at the local self-governance".
	(IP6, 43, P9, K 10, 2019)
Usage of online platform	"As I am a woman and a leader, it is possible that people can create a fake account and harass me online; thus, it will affect my personality and ability to trust society. Therefore, it is my responsibility to maintain the balance in communication and carry on with my duties without any interruption; only a determined leader can do it".
	(IP15, P7, K13, 2019)
Religious organizational activism	"As a member of my community religious organization, I was able to get connected to various sections of society, especially those connected with the religious organization. Thus, being a member and an active leader of the religious organization, I understood the scenarios and issues that the people in the community are facing. Thus, being an active member of an organization, I was noticed by the political leadership and nominated by them to represent and contest based on the party ticket. As I have a better understanding of various aspects of the community, I will be able to get connected with their real-life scenarios more, thereby trying to implement social developmental programs that will enhance their lives and well-being. Thus, I believe that being an active member and a leader of the religious organization can be a stepping stone for the party membership and being elected as a woman president at the local self-governance".
	(IP1, P3, K4, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Integrity

In order to identify if the elected women representatives possess integrity as a leadership trait, this research asks how integrity contributes to the administrative ability at the panchayat. In order to analyze it, the author is using a list of indicators associated with integrity and determining if the elected women representatives at the

panchayat can use their skills, as listed, for successful administrative practices at their corresponding panchayats.

According to Northouse (2013), the integrity of a leader is another important part of leadership. He says that the leader's integrity includes honesty and trustworthiness, having principles, taking responsibility, and dependability. However, according to the empirical findings, the author has found that women leaders at the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute some other important integrity features, such as constant social presence, dependency, empathy, compassion, violence prevention, Kudumbashree membership, education, party support, affiliation to party, usage of the online platform, and religious organizational activism, that are very important indicators for a woman leader at the panchayat to become a strong decision-maker.

Concerning the aspect of integrity, the honesty of the leaders is an important aspect. Because an honest leader can contribute to the administrative tasks at the local self-governance, especially in this study. The woman panchayat presidents have a huge role in engaging themselves with honesty in the panchayat regulations. In some cases, the poorest people in the lower classes need to have their services improved. There is an opposition in any society in the political arena; thus, various organizations will coordinate the ruling and opposition party's situation with a panchayat administration. Thus, a leader as well needs to control their duties and sometimes not to cross their boundaries while having administrative tasks. Only a person who enacts various forms of control inspires all organizations to work together in a transparent and united manner for the society's justice and is recognized as a capable political leader. Therefore, honesty is an essential part of any leader, and in the case of the panchayat, a president has to be honest with people all the time.

Another indicator of a leader's integrity is his/her trustworthiness of their people and people's trust towards the leader. When there is a disagreement between various political parties in the Gram Sabha or panchayat meetings, it is necessary to motivate all the people to work together in a spirit of trustworthiness by the women's leadership. When it comes to various central governments, state government projects, or fund allocation, a political leader must be recognized by the society as a person of inclusiveness. They have to harmonize various development activities, acknowledge diversity, and use technical knowledge. Most of the respondents agreed that it is required. Their experiences in various fields, such as Kudumbashree, and their experience in working in religious or other institutions helped them to be considered as leaders. Therefore, it is vital to consider various political and social possibilities and work collectively for society's leader. A leader in politics needs to be able to make rational decisions. Only an intelligent leader can evaluate his/her actions and make changes through self-evaluation. A panchayat's functioning can be bright in the political arena only when a leader can solve all the difficulties in exercising power without any personal problems. Simultaneously, the panchayat developments must adopt innovative and technical guidance and seek various leaders or trained people. It is supposed that they want to bring these

innovative ideas into their power and promptly lead various activities. In such case, a leader needs to hear and understand other people's problems.

The idea that any responsible political leader has something unique to work on for the integrity is possible. It depends on the participation of every political leader, i.e., to act responsibly and trustworthy. Only when leaders analyze and understand the shortcomings of their actions and understand their responsibilities, they can do well in governance. Therefore, for the panchayat's political development, women politicians must ensure that trustworthiness sense complies with the mind's duty to acknowledge others, act equitably, and be transparent. At the same time, a leader must be able to think wisely and make decisions during difficult times at work; thus, it is understood that each of the above is a set of intellectual standards for a leader to work in politics. Another significant characteristic of leaders' integrity is their character of keeping the principles. By keeping the principles, leaders, especially women presidents, are accountable for various plans that they handle. Therefore, being in principle is one of the significant traits that a woman president or a leader needs to carry forward. Concerning the selected district, women presidents state that being principled enabled them to win the public's confidence, promptly delivering welfare and other policies, and even getting reelected for the next term.

Another significant characteristic within the integrity category is taking responsibility. What concerns women presidents from the selected district, they state that taking responsibilities, even though it is very strenuous and hard to implement most of the time due to the diversity of the work, it can be seen as an essential trait for the overall efficiency of the administration and the delivery of duties. Through the proper control over the duties and the allocated responsibilities, the presidents or women leaders managed the responsibilities appropriately. Without proper control over the allocated functions and duties, it will lead to various imbalances in the administration and bureaucratic division, thereby not delivering societal needs and welfare measures in a timely and appropriate manner. Another significant characteristic trait in the integrity category is to be dependable on each other. It is necessary for a woman president or a leader to be dependable on each other, especially in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and diverse society, as being dependable on each other enables them to be comprehensive to those diverse ideas that are trying to encompass all when it comes to the policy formulation and implementation. Concerning the selected district, a woman president stated that taking dependability to each other enables them to be compassionate enough, hear those grievances of the diversified sections of society, and consider them while formulating policies and implementing those at the society level.

Another significant characteristic trait in the integrity category is technical knowledge. Having technical knowledge or expertise enables them to carry out administrative and bureaucratic policies cost-effectively in the modern times. Therefore, having technical knowledge enables them to formulate those policies which will have a wide-ranging impact on the societal realm. Concerning the selected district, a woman president states that even though most of them lack technical knowledge, due to various training programs conducted by the district administration and the local self-government, they were never able to get technical

knowledge that enabled them to formulate various policies, which will have a wide-ranging impact with a cost-effective manner.

Table 14 shows the indicators of integrity and examples from the elected women leaders on how each indicator contributes to the administrative ability at the panchayat.

Table 14. Integrity contribution to the administrative ability at the panchayat

Indicators of integrity	Examples
Honesty	"In my area, there are many illiterate people who are suffering from various social risks, including alcoholism. Hence, I need to understand each community and its needs without any prejudice and segregation with honesty; otherwise, people may lose their trust in my leadership. If I have such an honest mindset, I will help everyone equally by considering their socio-economic background. Therefore, I can increase my integrity in actions and increase the trust of people through my decisions". (IP18, P0, K0, 2019)
Trustworthiness	"I was a teacher for many years and never thought to enter into politics. But later, I decided to join the political activities, thereby getting selected to be the president of my panchayat. As a woman, I thought to do something for my people. Since we have the power now and make proper welfare decisions, I can serve people through political participation more. For this reason, I need to prove myself as a sincere and committed leader who is morally aware of my duties. Therefore, I need to be and treat everyone equally to have more integrity in myself, and the society will agree with my abilities. This will enable my trustworthiness towards people and their positive approach towards me. Hence, in the next election, my people can choose and vote for me again". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)
Having principles	"Being a woman president, I always feel being accountable, especially in terms of my principles, how I talk and behave with everyone in a society. Therefore, I believe that keeping the principles is one of the most significant character traits at the administrative level as well as the level of society; otherwise, it can lead to the loss of faith of the public in the administrative mechanisms and political leadership. Therefore, I always ensure that my activities and actions are accountable, ensuring transparency in my actions and implementation policies. Thus, I always value and cherish the aspect of accountability at the local self-governance". (IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Taking responsibility	"In my opinion, one of the most significant challenges that the leadership is facing at the Panchayat level, especially by the president, is the control of duties and fulfilling responsibilities without any delay. These are especially vulnerable when allocating the funds, as less control over such mechanisms can lead to misallocation and widespread corruption. Therefore, when it comes to the administrative management, I always ensure a proper control

	mechanism over various departments and divisions within the administrative mechanisms, ensuring administrative efficiency and transparency at the local self-governance. Therefore, I believe that responsibilities over duties can be seen as a significant trait of political leadership at the local self-governance".
	(IP7, P15, K 15, 2019)
Dependable on each other	"In the political arena, I believe that women leaders have a much more liberal approach to various ideologies and embracing various cultural diversity in the society. However, there were times when I had to depend on other leaders, especially party leaders, to make certain plans, especially related to the roadbuilding in my area. This is especially important for various religious and ethnic minorities, people with different sexual orientation, and others. When it comes to this diversity, men or the male representatives find it difficult to embrace it and accept it as normal. Maybe this is due to the humane and feminine nature that we can embrace various diversified opinions. Thus, I believe that it will be beneficial for the society as well as the administrative mechanisms if we have a liberal approach, especially when living in a diversified society like Kerala".
	(IP5, P20, K12, 2019)
Technical skills and innovative ideas	"In my panchayat, there are various places which are prone to the natural disasters and calamities. However, we are trying our best to protect the wealth and life of the citizens. At certain times, I need to decide, which may not be agreeable to the public, if they need to move to another area during flooding or landslide. I must convince people to agree with my idea by showing various presentations and discussions with higher disaster management officials in such a situation. Hence, I believe that innovative ideas will help people to understand the situation in detail and agree to the terms. Thus, such innovative and technical skills will increase my integrity in the society".
	(IP17, P10, K15, 2019)
Transparency	"In my panchayat, tourism and related industry are more significant; thus, we got many applications to open a resort or business from people inside and outside of the district or even state. In such cases, I must sanction their application without damaging the natural resources and protecting the geography. At certain times, if I reject, I have to face threats or aggressive comments from different business people or related political leaders or departments over my decisions. As a transparent leader and without any corrupt practices, I will do my best with sincerity to fulfill my duties. Hence, as a woman leader, I must keep my integrity, keep away from any corrupt situations, and motivate my colleagues to follow the same path".
	(IP19, P6, K10, 2019)
Organizational coordination	"For the better efficiency of administrative process, one of the most significant character traits is the organizational efficiency and coordination. Being the president of panchayat, I ensured that there was organizational efficiency and coordination between various

	departments and divisions as well. At the same time, the allocation of the funds will be equitable to various projects, irrespective of whether it is for men or women ward members. Thus, I ensure that there is an organizational efficiency and coordination within my panchayat, ensuring administrative efficiency and transparency". (IP8, P5, K 8, 2019)
Sense of coherence	"I always believe that there should be a sense of coherence when it comes to the policy formulation and decision-making. These are through the mechanisms like understanding the needs of the vulnerable section and the deprived sections, such as women and children, thereby formulating policies that are coherent to the needs of different sections, making an overall impact in the decision-making process. Thus, I believe that having a sense of coherence has to be seen as one of the most significant character traits of political leadership at the local self-governance". (IP12, P6, K11, 2019)
Political risk taker	"As a woman president who did not have much political background or experience in politics before, I had to do a lot of homework dealing with policy agendas and coordinating different groups and different ideological people together for the smooth functioning of the panchayat. However, since the opposite parties are fighting against each other on certain issues or agendas, it was my responsibility to make them to sit together and agree on certain common grounds. Hence, I had to make stronger decisions despite the opposition and denying any party strategy requirements, since I am not supposed to work for any specific political party or interest. Therefore, to be an impartial leader, I need to be neutral, listen to everyone carefully, and make proper decisions applicable and acceptable to the colleagues from different parties. Through this, I increased my integrity; otherwise, society would lose their confidence in me and consider me a leader who is not just". IP20, P4, K11, 2019)
Technical knowledge	"I believe that the technical knowledge can be seen as a significant aspect especially in the modern times when the technological development is more enhanced, and we live in a world of communication, and its applications. I can say that when I joined the political arena, I did not have much knowledge about the communication networks, but over time, with my persistence and the assistance of various communication development programs at the panchayat level, I was able to acquire technical knowledge and know-how, which enabled me to enhance my skills and have a hassle-free communication with the public at large. Moreover, using social media and other platforms, I was able to directly communicate with the deprived sections of the society, thereby trying to hear their grievances directly without any other filtration process. Thus, I believe that technological knowledge is one of the most significant prerequisites at the modern time". (IP17, P10, K15, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Sociability

In order to identify if the elected women representatives possess sociability as a leadership trait, this research uses the question how sociability enables influential politics at the panchayat. Thus, the author is using a list of indicators associated with sociability and determining if the elected women representatives at the panchayat can use their skills as listed for using their influential capacity at their corresponding panchayats, as shown in Table.

According to Northouse (2013), the sociability of the leader is another important part of the leadership. He says that the leader's integrity includes being friendly, outgoing, courteous, diplomatic, sensitive, concerned about others, understanding skills, and cooperative relationships with their followers. However, according to the empirical findings, the author has found that women leaders at the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute important key sociability features such as attribution of morality in actions, attribution of competency, visionary, futuristic, ambition, and innovation.

The following indicators significantly impact sociability and its ability to influence politics and decision-making for the women political representatives at the Panchayati Raj level. One of the significant character traits in the sociability category is being friendly. Being friendly enables the public to be approachable to the women presidents and leaders and share their grievances as they feel that they are getting connected with the political leadership due to the friendly mechanisms they envisioned. Thus, being friendly enables the public to approach the political leadership, thereby try to get rid of their grievances. About the selected district, a woman president stated that as they were friendly, it enabled them to get connected with the society, hear about the grievances of various sectors of the society, and try formal policies by trying to provide solutions to such grievances. It is an outstanding achievement to see the responsibilities of a panchayat when addressing women representatives directly and solving each person's problems before them.

Another significant characteristic trait in the sociability category is the outgoing character of the leader. Being friendly and warm enabled the public to connect without inhibition to state their grievances to the political leadership, especially women presidents. Regarding the selected district, a woman president states that approachability and outgoing traits enabled the public to connect without inhibition and state their issues. Through that mechanism, women presidents formulated policies and provided solutions to the society's problems. Another significant characteristic trait is the courteous aspect when it comes to the sociability category. Women presidents and leaders try to inspire society through inspiration, thereby implementing pro-societal policies. Through courteous mechanisms, they try to eliminate various societal issues and bad practices in the society. What concerns the selected district, the courteous attitude taken by the women presidents enables them to get the support of the public at large to implement those policies, which can have a beneficial approach towards society. Another significant characteristic is diplomatic power, especially in the sociability category. Diplomatic power,

especially how it is implemented or used by the political leaders, especially women presidents, can either be decisive or embraced by the public, especially when the policy, such as welfare under the mechanisms, create favorable circumstances for the overall well-being of the society. Therefore, when used rightly, diplomatic power can create federal situations; otherwise, it can lead to havoc in society.

Regarding the selected district, women presidents think that diplomatic power has great importance. If used in a proper equilibrium manner, it can create scenarios for society's overall well-being. They were always concerned when used in their jurisdiction, regarding the policy mechanisms and formulation. Regarding the sociability aspect, the women leaders believed in being pleasant and friendly and having a warm approach as being sensible to the issues of the public in the society and the public at large feels approachable towards the women presidents, thereby stating their fundamental needs of the society and the grievances that they are facing in their day-to-day lives. This shows that being pleasant and friendly enables the public to connect to a woman president rather than having a sense of fear and being less approachable. This enables them to formulate policies and measures with a futuristic approach and a visionary mechanism by creating innovative policy mechanisms that will have a long-lasting impact on the society in the long run. This enables the women political leaders, as presidents, to formulate such policy mechanisms, which will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of the society at a large. This is particularly evident in the case of the Idukki district as being vulnerable to the environmental issues and socially sensitive due to various diversified communities, religious and linguistic groups; through the mechanism of sociability, they were able to understand and perceive the real needs of the society and formulate such mechanisms and measures, which will have a far-reaching impact that will change the current inhibiting factors and mechanisms, thereby ensuring social justice.

Another significant characteristic trait in the sociability category is the leader's concern for others. Having a concerning approach enables the political leadership to consider those problems that the public is facing. These were enabled by the considerate approach, through which the public report their grievances, and various solutions have been taken at the political level. Concerning the selected district, the considerate approach enables the public to approach the presidents and state their grievances, thereby eliminating those scenarios by formulating proactive policy mechanisms.

The importance of being an influential person at the panchayat is a significant indicator of the sociability trait of a leader. In this study, there is a particular time where the presidents should acknowledge their needs to the MLA or minister and gain their attention. Thus, if a leader can get attention sufficiently and influence higher officials without delay, they are considered capable leaders in the society. Another aspect of sociability includes the competency of the leader in this study. A strong and motivated cooperative relationship with the president's followers is as well an important indicator of a leader's sociability nature. In the study, the author has witnessed that leaders who regularly communicate with their people through jagratha samiti or community meetings will decrease the distance between power

holders and common people. Therefore, most women leaders acknowledge that they have to keep trying to communicate with their followers to make new planning or change some existing projects to increase the wide array of opportunities for its residents in their panchayats. Another significant characteristic trait in the sociability category is the attribution of warmth. Being friendly and warm enabled the public to connect without inhibition and state their grievances to the political leadership, especially women presidents. Regarding the selected district, women presidents state that approachability and warmth enable the public to connect without inhibition to the state with their issues. Through such mechanism, women presidents formulated policies and provided solutions to the society's problems.

As a part of sociability, almost all women leaders said that they have to keep the higher competency level to be successful leaders in this study. As in many cases, women working as presidents have many duties to be fulfilled within a short time. They had to maintain strong competency in all sectors, from knowledge about the computer usage to presenting the output to the larger public. Therefore, if women do not have higher education or proficiency in legal matters, they have to learn it and gain strength by attending various trainings organized by the state government. Therefore, higher competency is an important part of sociability of the leaders in the panchayat. Another indicator of having a visionary approach is essential for women leaders to have strong sociability traits. It is supposed that a leader can make personal affection and friendships with people and convince all people that he/she is the one who can listen to their problems. In that case, it is certainly possible for a person to function effectively in the long run. A leader must think, act, and gain people's loyalty without any arrogance of power. If a leader has a visionary approach and is ambitious, people will accept the party and society more.

Another significant characteristic of the sociability trait is the futuristic approach of the leaders. It is a genuinely futuristic approach by the women presidents and leaders who formulate futuristic policies and programs by trying to implement them in the current times, which enabled them to get rid of various societal evils and other negative aspects that can negatively influence the societal realm. Thus, the futuristic approach enabled them to formulate policies and measures, which have a far-reaching vision. What concerns the selected district, women presidents state that the futuristic approach enabled them to formulate various policies, which try to create solutions in a far-reaching manner. The final significant aspect in the sociability category is the mechanism of innovation or innovative process. The women leaders or presidents create new mechanisms and processes, through such mechanism, they will create hassle-free administrative mechanisms and other developments in the administrative and bureaucratic sphere, facilitating speedy governance and more transparency in the administrative system. It will facilitate the equitable distribution of resources to the public at large.

Regarding the selected district, women presidents believe that being innovative helps to be seen in the administrative and bureaucratic processes, which is as a significant advantage. It will facilitate them to create more and more innovative ideas for greater transparency and better efficiency in the administrative system. They as well state that this innovative process will create more opportunities

for them to interact with the public, e.g., using social media and other platforms, thereby trying to hear the grievances directly from the public and create mechanisms that will provide justice to the deprived and underprivileged sections of the society.

Table 15 shows the sociability indicators and examples from the elected women leaders on how each indicator contributes to enable influential political capacity at the panchayat.

Table 15. Sociability enabling influential capacity in politics

Indicators of sociability	Examples
Friendly	"As a political leader and the president of the panchayat, I will always be friendly with the public, other colleagues, and people whom I am working with. I believe in the ideology that if you are friendly and approachable, people will try to embrace your ideas and be open to communicating their grievances and giving feedback, regarding the way your administration is handling various issues and problems. Therefore, I believe that being friendly can be seen as one of the most significant administrative traits, which will ensure transparency and openness in the administrative process. Moreover, it will help people to get connected with you and make them feel that you are there to hear their grievances and provide solutions to their issues. But this is not the case with everyone, I have seen many times that people keep a distance and try to be a bit more rigid and self-centered when it comes to their interaction with the public. Thus, in my opinion, if politicians keep distance from the public, it is not good for the better governance of the society". (IP14, P25, K15, 2019)
Outgoing	"I think that the attribution of warmth and outgoing or being approachable has to be seen as one of the essential characteristics needed for a politician, especially at the local self-governance when you have more interaction with the people. I can say that I express warmth and a friendly approach towards the public as it enables me to get connected with them and understand their grievances without any filtration. This is especially significant in the case of the Idukki district. Due to the area's vulnerability to various natural calamities, being warm and friendly helps people approach me directly rather than going to some other actors, thereby getting delayed in time as well as resources for their grievances. Moreover, in such situations, one needs to act in a safe manner, but having the attribution of warmth enables people to come directly, thereby reducing the time for providing solutions for such scenarios. Furthermore, the attribution of warmth helps women and children come to me and state their grievances, especially concerning physical and sexual violence, thereby ensuring the victims' privacy and speedily providing justice. Therefore, from my experience, I can state that the attribution of warmth is one of the most significant character traits for a

	politician, especially a woman political person or a president that is needed". (IP22, P7, K10, 2019)
Courteous	"Being courteous can be seen as one of the significant character traits in the sociability category. I was always trying to be inspirational by connecting with various sections of society and motivating them to come forward with their grievances. The administrative mechanism would provide solutions to such grievances. Moreover, I tried to interact with the public and motivate them through inspirational speeches to remove the mindsets of various social aspects and be amicable with other sections of society. This is especially significant in my region. In my area, we have a lot of people from diversified backgrounds, especially from various diversified linguistic groups, especially people from different language orientations, working in the tea plantations. Thus, through my inspirational speeches, I tried to educate them regarding the need to embrace each other and remove their mindsets, regarding various stereotypes towards other communities and minority groups and people with different sexual orientations. Thus, I think that inspiration is one of the significant characteristic traits that is needed for a woman political leader". (IP22, P7, K10, 2019)
Diplomatic	"I always believe in the notion that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Therefore, I need to be diplomatic with higher officials and politicians in my panchayat and my colleagues to have mutual help and support from each other for the development activities of my panchayat. When it comes to the attribution of power, I always try to be conscious regarding this concept and use the attribution of power in a stabilized or equilibrium manner without trying to enforce my ideological inclination into the attribution of power. As a woman president, representing a diversified society, I believe that attribution of power has a great significance, especially if not used properly. It can lead to distances towards the political leadership of the public and loss of their trust in the governance mechanisms at the local self-governance level. Thus, when it comes to the attribution of power, I always try to be conscious regarding this concept and try to implement it in a stabilized manner". IP19, P6, K10, 2019)
Socially sensitive	"Before coming into politics, I was a mere housewife and did not have many friends or social skills. However, now, I have developed my communication and social connections. I understood that it is essential for me to be friendly and sensitive to people, especially in my area. Many families are suffering from poverty and health issues associated with depression or alcoholism. I understand my people and their issues by communicating face-to-face. Thus, I will increase the reachability to people, and people will trust me and reach me if they need

	some help or have questions or even put some suggestions. Therefore, to be a successful leader, I need to be friendly with society. Many people, especially women and girls, had revealed to me that they are not afraid or hesitant to talk to me since I am a woman, and before they were very much hesitant to seek help from the previous male president, since they think that since I am a woman, I can understand them easier than a male leader". (IP21, P6, K10, 2019)
Concern about others	"As a woman president, I believe that being considerate to other needs makes the political representatives, especially women presidents, more approachable for the public to come directly and state their grievances. I feel that in most cases, especially when it comes to the male representatives, the public seems hesitant to approach them directly and state their grievances. This is mainly due to the male representatives' patriarchal approach carried out in the society. What concerns me, as a woman, I always feel passionate about being considerate, as it enables people to come directly towards me and state their grievances not only in times of natural calamities but also in ordinary times, especially when women and children are facing various kinds of sexual and physical violence, which are perpetrated towards them. Thus, by being considerate, it enables the public to approach me directly, state their grievances, and get solutions quickly". (IP23, P6, K10, 2019)
Understanding skills	"In my panchayat, like in other areas of the Idukki district, tourism is very prominent. There were many times in which I had to oppose the terms of political party heads on their demand to approve resorts that they lobby for. It is the biggest mistake and malpractice coming from the political party head. Since I am a woman and understand people who are suffering in a more humane manner than a man, I decided to stop the construction of buildings in the areas prone to threaten the natural habitat and protect the local community's land rights. Due to my strict leadership, I even got bad remarks from my political party. However, as a sincere and transparent leader, I decided to take such issues to the higher officials and prevent any vulnerable localities. Due to my pleasant skills, other officials have trust in my activities. Therefore, I believe that a woman can be strong and equally influencing and gaining support just as a man, to provide justice and the right service to the society by understanding the necessity of the society and make the higher official to understand the importance of their quick and efficient actions to resolve social issues". (IP23, P6, K10, 2019)
Cooperative relation with followers	"As a woman political leader and the president of the panchayat, I can always say that I was very ambitious when it comes towards the administrative process. You must know that the concept of being ambitious is not in a negative manner for my personal goals but for the welfare of society. I can probably say that I am

	ambitious for the welfare of the public at large to eradicate the exploitation of women and children, eradicate the sexual and physical violence, which is perpetrated towards women and children, eradicate the violence, which is perpetrated towards various minority groups, religious and ethnic minorities, and various sexual orientations. Thus, I can probably say that I am ambitious not for my personal goals, but the general welfare of the society". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)
Attribution of morality in actions	"In my panchayat, there was a severe case of rape of a minor girl. The vigilant committee that was formed in the ward informed me about the situation through the ward members in which the girl lives. We communicated with the police, counselors, and other legal organizations immediately, provided maximum assistance to the victim, and punished the culprit. However, in other cases, if there is a man president, the women may be hesitant to contact the authority on the right time because of the fear of the public and shame in the society. Still, since I am a woman, and I respect the victims' privacy and asked my colleagues to keep the victim's information away from the society, we could assist them properly. Thus, I believe that as a leader and as a woman, it is my responsibility to ensure and act morally and serve the community". (IP24, P3, K0, 2019)
Attribution of competency	"In my panchayat, we women leaders and male colleagues are equally participating together and provide services equally. However, there are times in which the male colleagues tend to show unwanted or unhealthy competition to prove that they are higher in society and their voices are important. In these cases, women leaders may be in confusion or feel a lack of motivation. In such times, as the president, I need to collaborate and communicate with male and female members together and try to resolve their unwanted competition spirit to prove themselves. I motivate them to work in a team. In order to do that, I should be competent and sufficiently equipped with a strong mindset and power. Therefore, I agree that women leaders need to constantly prove their power in a society more than men". (IP25, P11, K10, 2019)
Visionary	"To have the sociability skills and use them properly, it is important that I must be a visionary and see the strategies with a wider perspective. There were times in which I had to skip or drop-down agendas, which I intend to do for my panchayat, especially in the case of arranging water supply in one ward. Still, after studying the situation in detail, I understood that it would be even better if our panchayat could make a water supply facility in that area, facing severe drought in the summertime, to have water for longer times. They do not need to pay any money. Thus, I need to think about the future implications and do the project with a good vision that people would accept my leadership and

	acknowledge my services in the longer term".
	(IP22, P7, K10, 2019)
Futuristic	"I believe that futuristic approach needs to be taken not only at the national or the state level but also at the district and local self-governance level to change the public's mindset towards various social issues, which will enable us to come forward in a developed manner. Regarding the village level I represent, one of the most significant futuristic approaches is the orientation programs conducted at various institutions, public libraries, schools, and other educational institutions. As we all know that the incidences regarding the physical and sexual exploitation and violence towards women and children are increasing in the society, I believe that a futuristic approach regarding orientation, thereby trying to change their mindset, is required. When it comes to the orientation, regarding the approach towards women and children, it is better to start from the educational institutions at the primary level. It is a place where the mindset is developing various societal things. Thus, the orientation for respecting women and avoiding exploitation and physical harm to women and children can be seen as a significant approach regarding their futuristic mindset to orient the society. Thus, through these programs, we were able to shape the perceptions of the upcoming generations, thereby making them civilized, respecting and cherishing various diversities and social norms in the society. Thus, I believe that the futuristic approach has a great significance in the administrative mechanisms at the local self-governance level".
	(IP21, P6, K10, 2019)
Innovative	"Being the panchayat president, I always try to be innovative regarding the administrative mechanisms and bureaucratic process. I believe that being innovative is one of the significant aspects to get connected with the public. I implemented various schemes, such as direct communication to the president through social media and other platforms, thereby reducing the time gap to get connected and get rid of their grievances. Moreover, with this mechanism, I tried to ensure that they will not be obstructed by the redtails, which are normally prevalent in this society. Thus, I feel that being innovative is a significant process through which you will be able to get the knowledge regarding various issues that the public at large is facing and speedily providing the solutions".
	(IP15, P7, K13, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Therefore, from the empirical findings, the author has understood various indicators associated with each leadership trait. It enables women political leaders to be active in their governance at the panchayat.

Table 16. Findings on the indicators associated with the leadership traits

Indicators associated with the leadership traits				
Indicators of intelligence	Indicators of confidence	Indicators of determination	Indicators of integrity	Indicators of sociability
Verbal ability	Self-esteem	Constant Social Presence	Honesty	Friendly
Perceptual ability	Self-assurance	Initiative	Trustworthiness	Outgoing
Reasoning skill	Making differences	Persistence	Having principles	Courteous
Communication skills	Influencing others	Dominance	Taking responsibility	Diplomatic
Higher IQ	Behavior in public	Proactive	Dependable	Socially sensitive
Problem-solving skills	Openness to experiences	Perseverance	Technical skills and innovative ideas	Concern about others
Social judgment skills	Administrative knowledge	Constant social presence	Transparency	Understanding skills
Constant activism	Public speech	Dependency	Organizational coordination	Cooperative relation with followers
Value-oriented	Motivational character	Empathetic	Sense of coherence	Attribution of morality in actions
Knowledge and awareness	Situational approach	Compassionate	Political risk taker	Attribution of competency
Human rights advocate	Regulative character	Violence prevention	Technical knowledge	Visionary
Participation in Gramasabha	Self-esteem	Kudumbashree membership		Futuristic
Negotiation	Self-assurance	Education		Innovative
Objective	Making a difference	Party support		
Power structure uses	Influencing others	Affiliation to party		
Self-monitoring	Behavior in public	Usage of online platforms		
Emotional intelligence	Openness to experiences	Religious organizational activism		
Behavioral control	Administrative knowledge			
Media management	Public speech			

Risk-taker	Motivational character			
Radical	Situational approach			
	Regulative character			

Source: created by the author

3.3. Social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership

Gender disparity in leadership is a worldwide trend where women are overwhelmingly clustered in leadership positions with lower authority than men (Powell, Graves, 2003). The writers tend to say that there are still gender gaps in leadership styles and women's leadership in contemporary societies (Helgesen, 1990). When women are self-promoting and negotiating, they face significant gender biases and social disincentives. For example, unlike men, self-promoting women are less socially desirable and less hirable (Rudman, Glick, 2001). Moreover, women face higher social costs than men to initiate negotiations (Bowles et al., 2007). Women leaders' groups must encourage and have inclusion practices to increase equal opportunities to express their views, consider and appreciate the differences between individuals, facilitate collaborative work on tasks, and resolve disagreements productively when working in any local self-government institution. When a panchayat administration works inclusively, group members are optimistic. Ferdman et al. (2010) describe this experience as a degree to which individuals feel safe, confident, accepted, respected, supported, valued, fulfilled, engaged, and authentic in their work environment, both as individuals and identity member groups. When most of the group participates in inclusive activities, it will motivate its members to follow inclusive practices. As a leader, the challenge is to promote the sense of inclusion among the followers and influence its diversity and inclusion approach. Based on the primary interview with elected women leaders at the panchayat, the author has found various social and cultural challenges that women face, as listed in Table 17. The analysis of the study is illustrated with respondents' replies.

A panchayat governing body is responsible for providing more financial services to men or avoiding situations where women represented wards are not given much prominence. Still, it is often questioned how much of this misallocation is in practice. As in the statement mentioned above, in order to overcome this misallocation, there should be a transparent process where men should come in terms with the female ward representatives, regarding the equitable allocation, thereby enhancing the overall welfare of all the wards rather than giving a predominant allocation to the male board members and their wards.

One of the significant dangers that is associated with harmonious living in a society is segregation, especially at the community and communal levels. These are primarily regarding situations in which various communities, rather than embracing each other and living in harmony, tend to live separately with an attitude of fear, suspicion, and hatred towards one another. Moreover, sidelining and segregating

gender diversified groups, migrant and other minority groups and communities show the segregation aspect of the society. Most of women representatives noticed communal or community level segregation, even though being a historical phenomenon, that appear mainly due to the proliferation of radical and religious political affiliations and parties in the state of Kerala, which tend to have an impact, especially among various communities, because rather than living in harmony, they are trying to segregate and live in suspicion and hatred. Thus, a woman representative feels very sensitive towards these issues and tries to formulate policies and measures to resolve such incidences.

As in the aspect mentioned above, when it comes to the cultural sensitivity, women representatives were more compassionate towards cultural sensitivity and embracing those cultural diversities. However, when it comes to embracing cultural diversity, male members still carry forward their notion of patriarchal mindset and stereotypes, thereby being hesitant to embrace cultural diversity. According to the female representatives, when it comes to the cultural diversity, male ward members are adamant about such measures, especially towards embracing various cultural diversified groups, especially the tribal communities, minority groups, and the migrant workers. They are working in the tea plantations and other sectors in the district.

Nevertheless, leaders that have been elected as representatives must understand that they are not subjected to the political parties' opinions or governing. This can be seen as one of the most determining factors for women presidents or representatives. Unlike the men who enter politics either with their party affiliation or not, women mostly enter under the support of a political party or by the guidance of a political mentor. Thus, they were always forced to comply with the party's ideological interest while formulating policy decision-making in most cases. Moreover, if they go against such political interests of the political parties they represent, it can further lead to the wrath of the political party that they represent, thereby neglecting them or sidelining them and refusing to get party tickets to contest in the next elections.

It is essential to have a clear understanding of the primary development activities and be able to analyze the ideas raised by the women's representatives critically for a panchayat development committee-led discussion to be successful. Still, this study shows that this is not always the case. In many wards of a panchayat, there are often obstacles to deliver the development finances equally, i.e., in some wards, more money must be spent for the development. In other words, in lesser cases, female representatives' views are either the same, or in some situations, disagreeing with men. These are mainly facilitated by the higher representation of men in the panchayat and other committees where even though the head of the panchayat is a woman representative or a president; however, due to the higher disparity of men and their collective bargaining power, this leads to the sidelining of the female representative's voices and thereby lesser allocation of funds for their developmental projects and their wards. Even though the president tries to allocate on an equitable basis, but due to the scenarios mentioned above, such things are rarely happening, mainly due to the bargaining power of the male ward

representatives. Thus, in order to overcome this process, either men should be educated to an extent to understand the equitable distribution in a democratic process or the president should throw her discretionary authority needs to allocate it equitably.

It is an excellent thing for married women representatives to be able to carry out their family responsibilities properly as well as political matters at the same time, because they need support from their husbands and especially husbands' parents in their political arena. In contrast, having a conversation regarding this aspect, it was named as one of the challenging parts by the women representatives or presidents, as they state that regarding the support from the family, it has been one of the challenging aspects due to the patriarchal mindset of the family members and especially the in-laws and the husband. These are most visible, mainly when various natural calamities, communal riots, or other incidents occur. The female representatives need to travel for long hours, consult with the male counterparts, and even travel together. In such scenarios, the family members lack of cooperation and making hearsays and rumors make the life of the women representatives challenging and less comfortable.

Another significant constraining aspect that the women representatives or leaders face at the local self-governance is cybercrimes or other incidences perpetrated through technological enhancement. While having the conversation, most of their representatives, especially the presidents, believed when it comes to the aspect of cyber threat and cyberbullying, they felt that they are very conscious when they make some political statements or speeches, as it can be framed differently, thereby trying to create negative perceptions towards their political statements. Moreover, most of women representatives stated that they are afraid and are very much conscious about the social media activities, as they are even afraid to make a public post with their pictures. Sometimes, it can lead to the defamation by specific vested groups who morph those pictures and try to make it in a disgraceful manner. Thus, when it comes to the cybercrimes or technological advancement, women representatives at the local self-government are more vulnerable than their male counterparts in this regard. As technological growth and advancement are essential in a society, women leaders worldwide face cybercrimes, and the abuses are increasing more than before.

Since the elected representatives lead ward-level developments for each ward, it is a great challenge for women leaders to make collective decisions as a panchayat authority while each member considers their issues. The needs of people from different spheres and the need to implement their new policy formulation clearly and precisely are fundamental. It can be seen that with regards to the woman representation and the significances of their voices and narratives, unlike male representatives, the woman president's narrations and political statements get higher significance and lesser objection from the male counterparts. This can be mainly attributed to the women representatives as the president of the local self-government holds the power. However, even though women presidents got a higher authority and voice in the decision-making, other deliberations within the panchayat, when it comes to the discussions or deliberations within the political parties which they

represent, they get lesser significance due to the male domination and the patriarchal mindset of the political parties, which they represent. Moreover, the political parties were nominating them, and before being nominated by the political party due to the lack of political experience and the complete obligation towards the political party, it made them vulnerable in front of the political party to get significant positions to raise their voices and ideas.

In many panchayats, the development activities are halted halfway due to the lack of financial security or approval from the higher echelons to formulate their policies. If in that panchayat, the president is a woman, then, of course, women representatives are often subjected to criticism from various people. Women often face criticism from many quarters in society that the inability to implement development is because the president is a woman and incompetent or not fit to hold such a leadership position. One of the crucial factors is the lack of transparency in the financial allocation and their distribution to various funding programs. Even though a woman president as the head of the government allocates funds for various developmental projects, but due to the current practices and shady behaviors of the male ward members and other representatives, these funds will not reach the deserved people and activities, thereby getting the projects halted in the halfway. Women representatives believe that in those scenarios, rather than trying to perceive the reality behind such incidences, the administration, together with the public, seem to blame the women representatives, especially the president and other board members for the lack of completion of those projects, thereby trying to defame the efficiency and administrative capacity of the women representatives at the panchayat level.

If a leader can engage everyone equally and accurately analyze the statements of different parties and formulate a policy without becoming a leader who imposes their decisions on other people, then, of course, it is their influence. Therefore, even if women leaders can use their influence and work together to create a better society, the people's approval is very important. Thus, the personality or charisma of a person has a significant role in influencing others and formulating their perceptions. It can be observed that the highest approval rate regarding the influence or charisma can be attributed to the male representatives due to their words, actions, and other mechanisms through which they try to propagate their charisma. What concerns the women representatives, the female representatives as well have a significant role in propagating their charisma, especially at the local self-government level, mainly by the women presidents. However, when it comes to the ward representatives, they tend to have less charisma or influential capacity due to their lesser positions and domination of the male members within the group. However, even though the women representatives unanimously state that they have more influential capacity in the political decision-making at the LSG level, but when it comes to the political parties, they feel to have lesser influential charismatic personality, since they have been selected and handpicked by the political parties and political mentors. Therefore, it did not seem to show a more significant influence or charismatic impact on the political parties and their political leaders.

Another significant aspect is the representation and engagement of women political leaders and representatives in the decision-making and deliberations. Even though women presidents were actively involved and taken into consideration during the discussions and deliberations, but when it comes to other representatives, such as the ward members, the male ward members get more representation and more voices in the discussions and deliberations than the female ward members. This is due to the male domination in the deliberations and discussion process, in which they try to dominate and sideline the female ward member's voices and narratives. This is mainly due to the patriarchal mindset and attributions of society towards female political representatives. Unlike the women presidents, the ward members carry less power attribution, thus trying to dominate over their policy mechanisms.

As a leader for a panchayat, as Idukki, women often face various social or economic barriers and unforeseen problems, especially when it comes to any natural calamity. This study shows that women representatives must work harder than male representatives to protect the people's safety and lives in their panchayat and protect their life, property, and social status in any way. These are predominant in less comfortable situations where they encounter physical and other verbal gestures while having field trips and inspections, especially during natural calamities and other disasters. Moreover, these kinds of trips can create suspicions in the in-laws and family members, which create discomfort situations in their families. Thus, unlike male-female representatives, they have a great challenge when working with the public, especially during the natural calamities and other natural disasters.

Another significant challenging aspect that a woman faces is the gender barriers or distinction. Most of the women representatives stated that even though they did not face many gender barriers or restrictions within the LSG due to the reservation of seats for women and their position as a president of the administrative body, the aspect of gender barrier or distinction is lesser feasible in such bodies. However, being a member of the political party through which they represent the local self-governance when it comes to the representation in the political party, they face gender barriers of distinction predominantly in the political parties where most of these positions in the political parties are held by the male representatives. Furthermore, as most women candidates or representatives chosen for the local self-governance were directly handpicked by the political parties or recruited by the political parties, they tend to have lesser voices when trying to achieve gender neutrality in such political party mechanisms. Thus, even though they tend to have gender equality within the LSG, when it comes to gender equality in political party levels, there is a higher proportion of gender distinction and barriers.

The study has found that in a situation where men representatives often disagree with what women are saying and their opinions, or if men in the society do not agree with woman leader's views, there are obstacles to assert their position and advance political prominence. This reveals a barrier to women's representation in a patriarchal society; thus, it is essential to clearly understand what constitutes a system for male and female representatives to carry out their duties. From the narrative, as mentioned above, it can be seen that most of these patriarchal mindset

attitudes or male domination are happening especially towards opposing the idea of political ideologies where women represent or hold higher positions, and in such situations when men find it unacceptable for them to approve that decision-making due to the patriarchal mindset, they try to dominate women representatives or ignore them, trying to degrade their morale, and make them to be less competitive in comparison to men. Such scenarios need to be changed to transform gender representation at the political level properly.

The awareness of gender and upliftment of women among the people working in the panchayat as well as all people in society is essential for society's growth. It is often a common occurrence in most societies and panchayats that skepticism about women representatives' leadership and how much they can work with men is one of the main reasons women representatives often fail to excel in politics. Therefore, raising the awareness of gender equality between men and women may be a fundamental factor in this social change. While having the conversation, most female presidents or representatives state that the lack of gender awareness can be the main constraint while developing women representatives at the local self-government. These are most visible from the colleagues and other party members who lack awareness. Even though they are aware, they try to ignore this gender equality due to the male representatives' patriarchal mindset and stereotypes. Thus, creating gender awareness is one of the most crucial and critical factors for women's overall development and political enhancement. It should not be done at the local or state government levels, but the society at large through the upcoming generations that will be socially responsible for the gender equality, which will enhance such mechanisms with future generations.

A significant obstacle for women political leaders working in the panchayat is their work experience, which they did not have in the past. Working in the leadership position for Kudumbashree has helped the functioning at the local self-level. However, it is often desirable to have a political guru who can make them enter the political arena, work enthusiastically in the public sphere, and guide them forward, but not everyone has such political gurus. These political mentors are most significant for women representatives with less political background or experience, working with administrative mechanisms and not having a proper family background, regarding the political orientation. Others may have a social status that they grew up with due to their own family, but others have no political background. While having conversations, most of the women representatives stated the need for political mentors. They need that the parties and other institutions would help with such political mentors; however; some had the opinion that the current generation's experiences and political ideas can further facilitate the next generations' political membership, in which the current women representatives or presidents can provide the membership. This has a great significance, as the membership provided by the women representatives will give more insights regarding women empowerment for the younger women representatives or presidents.

The cooperation from the community is essential. It will enable the political representatives, especially women, to sustain their political activities and thereby their active social service with the entire purpose, only if they have the support of

the community, in which they live and the freedom of expression recognized by their leadership. Regarding the corporation from the public and other social space, unlike men, women representatives get lesser corporation especially from the colleagues, society at large, and the family, particularly. These are mainly in the form of lesser appreciation for the work that has been done at the governance level, collective bargaining for the allocation of funds by the male counterparts, the lack of respect, especially during consultations and discussions with the public, due to the patriarchal mindset, and finally the lack of appreciation and support from the family members, especially during the times of natural calamities, in which women have to spend more time and even travel at night for rescue measures.

It is a great fallacy that women can still not enter political positions in the public sphere even if they carry out their responsibilities with due diligence. This is mainly regarding the higher positions in the municipal and district administration and having meetings and dialogues with district administration. According to the women presidents and representatives, they state that when it comes to the negotiation, dialogues, and other discussions, even though they have women presidents, their voices are heard less, and male counterparts try to dominate, especially the ward members who have more backing by the political parties tend to dominate in such dialogues and discussions, trying to undermine the position and authority of the women presidents and other counterparts.

Similar to the community segregation, another significant segregation mechanism in society, especially about the women's political participation and leadership position, is the segregated mentalities that are carried forward by the religious and caste organizations. At the same time, having the conversations, most representatives state that they feel that these kinds of religion and caste tend to have a significant impact and decisive effect on women's representation and political participation, especially for women from such religious and caste groups. This is because religion and caste play a significant role in the social and family life. If the actions of the women representatives are not consistent with the interest of the vested caste and religious organization, they try to influence the society and family of those women representatives, thereby constraining them and forcing them to come to terms with the religious and cast organizations. Besides, it is a remarkable fact that the influence of other organizations, especially non-religious ones, is to make decisions or consider their interests more. Men are at the top of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and land ownership in the patriarchal society. Some patriarchal systems are patrilineal, since the male lineage inherits property and titles.

Idukki district has many people of different religions and castes in many panchayats. As a politician, there is a great need to treat all people equally and all issues equally. That is why it is essential for a woman leader to embrace diversity. However, when it comes to diversity and inclusiveness, the male representatives or counterparts tend to be more hesitant and skeptical towards embracing such diversity, especially different gender orientations and people with different viewpoints. This can be mainly attributed to the patriarchal mindset of the male society, which is still embedded in their notion. During the discussion, most of the

women representatives stated that the male counterparts, especially the ward members and other bureaucratic and administrative actors, are hesitant and always vocal against the inclusionary measures taken by the women representatives, especially towards the gender diversified groups and other ethnic, religious minorities, and tribal communities.

Regarding sexism as a challenge towards women leaders, most representatives stated that these were mostly experienced when natural calamities occurred. They must travel even at midnight to facilitate the accommodation and other facilities for the weaker sections of society. During those times, some vulgar comments or sexist remarks were made, indicating sexual favors by some members or individuals in the society.

Another significant aspect that women representatives face when it comes to the decision-making is the perpetuation of violence, especially sexual and verbal violence perpetrated by the counterparts. Regarding the opinion of woman president representatives, the majority states that when it comes to the aspect of violence, either physical, sexual, or verbal violence, even though they have not experienced it due to their position in the leadership hierarchy. However, when it comes to the other representatives, such as the ward members and other political representatives, they state that they have heard that these kinds of representatives encounter some form of verbal violence at least once in their life, mainly by the gossip, rumors in the society, and during the decision-making deliberations, in which the opposition party leaders verbally abuse women representatives, especially the board members and other political candidates. Thus, when it comes to the part of violence perpetrated towards women representatives, there is a significant amount of violence perpetrated towards women representatives, especially towards women representatives of different political parties. Thus, the violence perpetrated against women has a great significance in decision-making at the local self-government level.

For a woman leader, the cooperation of other people's representatives working in the panchayat is needed. Whether male or female, the elected representatives from different wards are people from different parties who can often make and implement decisions with the political party's support. Still, women representatives are less likely to run in the next election if they do not act in a way that goes beyond the party's decisions politically. Therefore, maintaining a friendly approach when working with colleagues without hostility is one of the most important things that a female representative should do with more care than a male representative. These are particularly visible in a case, in which the women representatives should always align with the parties political decision-making or party's leadership while implementing or formulating policy mechanisms, because going against such processes and carrying forward according to their rational behavior can create havoc with the party leadership and positions. In such scenarios, women representatives will mostly be sidelined for the next election and not get a party ticket to run for the position.

Another aspect related to the participation of women in the local self-governance is regarding the workspace flexibility. Unlike other governance bodies, in the district, state, and national bodies, the deliberations have been conducted with

much workspace flexibility, mainly in the form of having deliberations and meetings via various online platforms and providing necessary relaxation when it comes to the governance and decision-making. However, due to the village level aspect of the local self-governance and the rigid nature of the male representatives, which they propose and favor to have meetings, and decision-making mainly in the office premises and within given territorial jurisdiction, workspace flexibility seems to be less appropriate in the local self-governance at the village level. According to the narrations by the representatives, especially women presidents, most of them believe that when it comes to the workspace flexibility, they tend to have lesser workplace flexibility and need to be physically available at the office jurisdiction for decision-making and governance purposes. Even though this is appropriate for decision-making and deliberations; however, it tends to be inappropriate and unacceptable, especially during times of natural calamities and unrest when the women representatives, especially the presidents, must travel long hours and spend a long working hours with the deprived section, thereby making it less feasible for them to be physically present in the administrative jurisdiction for decision-making. In such scenarios, even though they request workspace flexibility, they tend to get lesser workspace flexibility due to the rigid mentalities and stereotypes of the male representatives.

Table 17. Categories of social and cultural challenges of women leadership

Social and cultural challenges of women leaders at the Panchayat	Examples
Access to equal opportunities	"Even though being a woman head of the panchayat, I felt that equal access to opportunities is seldom applicable in the Local Self-government. These are especially evident in the unequal allocation of funds for male ward members compared to women. During the discussions and deliberations, the women members' voices and statements were seldom significant or were taken for consideration or policy formulation. I felt that these factors contribute to the lack of equal access to opportunities". (IP4, P16, K10, 2019)
Community-level segregation	"As a woman president, I felt that the community level segregation is a significant process that is hampering the democratic process at the LSG. Being a district of various diversities, including cultural, religious, and linguistic, and organizing various associations only looking at the vested interest, I felt it a challenging aspect for the overall progress of the democratic process at the LSG". (IP19, P6, K10, 2019)
Cultural sensitivity of women leadership	"As a woman president, I always felt that it is necessary to have social and cultural inclusiveness to improve the democratic process. These are especially visible in culturally sensitive groups, like the LGBT, minorities, linguistic groups, migrant workers, tea plantation workers, and the tribal population. I felt that the male counterparts lack or fail to see the bigger picture regarding these aspects".

Dependency on specific party	"As a woman president, it is undeniable that the party membership is an indispensable factor for entry into the political and proper orientation about the democratic process, especially for women from diverse backgrounds. However, over the time, the party's dependency, especially the party's leadership to comply with the decision-making ideologies, tends to be challenging to deliver the policies and programs via society's democratic values". (IP11, P7, K 5, 2019)
Economic inequality	"As a president, I felt economic inequality, especially in allocating various developmental projects' funds. Even though, as the head of the panchayat, I tried to distribute the funding to the male and female ward members equally. However, due to the democratic process and the aspect of consensus, the male ward members tend to get better allocation of the funds mainly attributed to the unproportioned male voices for allocating bigger funds to male ward members". (IP3, P7, K10, 2019)
Family structure	"As a woman leader, I feel that one of the most constraining aspects of women empowerment and political participation, especially at the leadership positions, is the family structure and its hierarchical nature. These structures and relations fail to understand and accommodate the needs of women leaders. Due to the complexity of the work and the need to balance family needs, women leaders carry forward many mental and physical distress, especially when they tend to take responsibilities during natural calamities and other emergencies". (IP6, P9, K 10, 2019)
Fear of cyber abuse	"Being a woman president, one of the significant fears of women leaders at the LSG level is the fear of cyber abuse. This digital and new media communication age misuses women leaders' images and videos, both politically and sexually. Women leaders are afraid to portray themselves through social networks". (IP6, P9, K 10, 2019)
Feeling valued	"As a woman president, I felt that my decisions were valued, especially in decision-making and allocating funds to various projects. However, I felt that it seems to be less valued when it comes to the decision-making and deliberations at the party level due to the significant male domination of the political parties and the fact of being selected and nominated for the post by the party". (IP14, P7, K13, 2019)
Feeling authentic	"Being a woman president, I felt that one of the significant challenges in the administration is less authenticity in the male counterparts' administrative process. As it is a notion and reality that women leaders are less corrupted and tend to align with the middlemen's abusive practices, they tend to be less authentic in disclosing the plans. They believe that their intentions and corrupt measures will be disclosed if revealed". (IP16, P5, K0, 2019)

Feeling influential	"Being a president, I feel that I am influential in decisions and discussions. However, when it comes to the party level, especially when proposing policy agendas, particularly for women empowerment, they seem to be less concerned about my opinions, making me feel less influential at the party level, but being influential at the LSG level". (IP15, P25, K15, 2019)
Feeling involved and engaged	"Being a woman president, I felt involved and engaged, especially in the political meetings and deliberations and the allocations of the funds. However, sometimes, I felt that the voices and dissents of the fellow women leaders, especially the ward members, tend to be less involved and engaged due to the male leadership attitude towards them". (IP13, P4, K 10, 2019)
Feeling safe	"Being a woman president, I felt safe being on the premises and other events of the LSG. However, I sometimes experienced insecurity and the consciousness of being a woman, especially during natural calamities and other emergencies. I needed to travel long distances and accommodate some motels and guest houses alone. Even though no physical harm has been experienced, the atmosphere and the gestures of the fellow mates can sometimes make you uncomfortable as well as the concerns raised by the family members, especially the in-laws and husband". (IP12, P6, K11, 2019)
Gender barriers	"As a woman president, I felt the gender barrier more at the party levels than at the LSG level. Being a president at the LSG, it is difficult to showcase the gender barrier. In contrast, where most of the male members occupy the positions at the party level, the gender barrier seems to be significantly predominant. I felt that I was denied of the possibility to be a leader at the party level, even though I have about four years of experience in the political arena. Thus, technically it seems that the leadership at the political party level will be reserved mainly for the male members rather than the female members. Moreover, one of the important reasons for such discrimination was because I am a female and the stigma that exists in the society. It is still visible at the party level that a female will not be able to fulfill the task and duties as a man. Therefore, the party prefers male leaders rather than female". (IP13, P4, K 10, 2019)
Lack of knowledge about gender equality in society	"Being a woman president, I find it especially challenging. Being in a leadership position, male counterparts tend to have considerable knowledge of gender equality, especially in the office and party leadership. But due to the patriarchal mindset and male-dominant households, I find that the common people have a lesser orientation towards gender equality. It needs a considerable amount of time and energy to infuse these ideas to the public to change their mindset". (IP8, P5, K 8, 2019)
Lack of mentors	"As a woman president from a humble background, I feel that most women leaders find it hard to get the advice of a facilitator or

	mentor to empower the political and democratic values. The political parties provide mentorship for the women leaders, from which women leaders are coming. However, I feel that the party leadership should have more aggressive measures and inclinations for a woman leader's grooming". (IP9, P8, K 15, 2019)
Lack of respect	"As a woman leader, I felt that the women and political leaders lack proper respect in the LSG and at all governance levels. Due to the legal measures, the male counterparts cannot deny our presence in the local governance and decision-making process. Even though they need to comply with the process and hear the voices, they comply without much appreciation. Moreover, the statements, gestures, and body language in the deliberation process signal the lack of respect for women statements and voices". (IP5, P20, K122019)
Limited access to higher leadership	"As a woman president, whenever I needed consultation or the allocation of the funding from the district administration or at the state level, the male counterparts tend to dominate the access. I felt that it is mainly attributed to their ability to convince the party leadership, thereby getting the accessibility as they tend to bear the political party's vested interest". (IP21, P6, K10, 2019)
Other religious organizations interference	"As a woman leader, I feel that the interference in the LSG governance, especially by the religious and caste organizations with a vested interest, is a great constraint. They tend to pressure to implement policies that align with their religious interests, which as a leader, being in the democratically elected position, I find it challenging". (IP20, P4, K11, 2019)
Patriarchy	"As a woman leader in my panchayat, I felt due to the patriarchal mentalities, especially in the policy decision-making and group consultations, the ideas and plans of the women leaders were neglected or sidelined. These were especially visible from the opposing political ideologies' leaders who tend to ignore or belittle woman leader's ideas". (IP1, P3, K4, 2019)
Honoring diversity	"Being a woman president and a compassionate human being, I tend to be human to various needs of the public and various sections of the society by honoring diversity. However, even though the male counterparts tend to accommodate women's leadership and activities due to the reformative legal measures, they fail to honor the cultural and other societal diversities. These are especially visible in the incidents of the inclusionary measures of the LGBT communities in the LSG, where the female leadership conducted many of the initiatives and measures. In my case, I belong to a Hindu religion; therefore, sometimes, I felt that when I am in a public space, with other religious people or different Hindu communities, who are from the higher position like administrative sectors etc., even though I do have quite a higher number of

	working experience in politics; however, because I belong to a Hindu religion and a cast in which is considered to be a little bit lower, I felt that in such meetings, in which the so called elite rich class people will be sitting, they were not very often eager to talk to me or listen to my opinions seriously. Therefore, I believe that honoring diversity of people without any religion or caste or other barriers is very important if we need more women in the political sector". (IP17, P10, K15, 2019)
Sexism	"Being a panchayat president, I consider the sexism aspect towards the women leaders considerably lower than ordinary women. I felt that it is mainly attributed to the fear of being exposed due to the local self-government's highest position. However, I occasionally find many sexist remarks or gestures, especially from the men during the field visits or inspection. Especially, there are times in which I, as a woman leader, need to travel with my male counterpart or male colleague to some areas when there is natural calamity and other incidences where we need to move the citizens immediately to any shelter house, no matter if it is day or night. Thus, at such times, we need to travel, maybe, with many men and just me or one of my female colleagues. After that, sometimes, in the society, some people tend to make rumors about women leaders and make some stories about us in a negative manner with the name of the male colleagues whom we were traveling together to save people. Thus, I believe that if it was a male, people would not have been able to talk like that. However, since we are women, and in the society, there still is a sigma that women need to be in a house after 8:00 o'clock or they need to be inside the house before 10:00, o'clock, etc. However, when it comes to a leadership position as a female leader, it is not possible to do that all the time. Especially when there are difficult scenarios like flooding in this panchayat. Therefore, such sexist attitudes and opinions have to be carefully removed, and the society needs to think in a more advanced way that we, female leaders, would not be feeling bad after helping the society and much more confident in doing what we are doing for the society without any limitation". (IP2, P14, K15, 2019)
Violence against women leaders	"Even though I was a woman president, I have not experienced any specific violence issues from my counterparts; I have heard that some had experienced some form of violence, especially verbal violence during the deliberations or during the natural calamities, which got aggravated due to the opposition party leader's statements and comments". (IP19, P6, K10, 2019)
Workplace discrimination	"Being a woman leader, I feel that workplace discrimination is one of the significant challenges women leaders face, especially at the LSG. I find that these are more visible in the decision-making deliberations and the allocation of funds for various developmental projects. There were incidences, in which a male ward member

	would like to allocate more funds only to his wards; however, as a woman president, I am not able to divide the funds unequally. Of course, it is important to prioritize the development process and projects. However, it is my responsibility to make sure that the funding allocation for various wards must be equally distributed depending on the priority level. Therefore, during the discussion, the male ward member was trying to raise voice against me, and I felt that if it was a male president, that man would not be raising his voice in a way that he raised his voice towards me. Hence, I believe that sometimes, even women presidents face discrimination at the workspace, especially when it comes to various strategies and implementation procedures. If we do not agree with the male leaders, then it is possible that they will harass or raise a voice against us without much validation or thinking in a proper, transparent manner". (IP7, P15, K 15, 2019)
Workspace flexibility	"As a woman president, I felt a bit of a constraint to have lesser workspace flexibility. The leaders tend to be on the administrative platform for envisaging the plans and policies, unless using other tools. Even during calamities and other events, we were forced to travel back to the office to conduct discussions and meetings, which occupy a large part of the valuable governance time". (IP17, P10, K15, 2019)

Source: created by the author

Devika (2019) identified that sex is a power axis, and women's positions are very limited in society even now. Within the family, power flows across two axes, and both influenced women's roles. In the husband-wife partnership, husband was expected to provide care and pleasure, and wife was expected to take an equal or more significant share of moral and emotional responsibility of intimacy. As a mom, woman provided the effort and supervision that is necessary to raise children into individuals and autonomous citizens of the prevailing social order. Therefore, the empirical study results clearly show a considerable change in the societal approach towards women's freedom to participate in a political career actively.

According to the findings, most elected women representatives agree that their role as women, wives, and mothers still limits their access to individual identity and becomes a hurdle for them to actively participate in democracy and leadership. There are various reasons which hinder the growth of women's participation in politics. They can see that society's stereotypes and prejudice, which considers politics, are only for men and the private sphere, as domestic and family households. Arrangement belongs to women. Lack of time for women to attend community meetings and activities due to lack of support from a man in the family care, lack of family, and spousal support for women in political leadership still exist. Some religious restrictions, especially within the Muslim community, prevent women from going outside their homes for community events as well as violence against women leaders and harassment if exposed to public events, such as meetings and deliberations. The difference in socio-economic stability forces women to have

private or public jobs instead of a political career; there is a difference in treating women and men politicians in terms of considering higher positions, usually men have higher chances to attain superior leadership than women politicians. Moreover, anything differentiating the visibility of women's leadership in the media is more compared to men. Men tend to have more support from journalists' sexist attitudes, there is less opportunity for women leaders to raise funds than men due to the lack of chained networking, and the lack of training and self-esteem for women to be active hindrance leadership positions in politics.

3.4. Men's perspective on women in political leadership

Since recognizing the importance of women's upliftment and empowerment in different parts of the world and their equal participation in various spheres of life is getting much more attention, it is imperative to study women's political significance in Kerala and India. Compared to other countries, India has a culturally significant position for women to play a political role in society and compete in various fields. The main challenge is the socio-economic family background and leadership ability that keeps women behind in the political arena and participation in the legislature decision-making. Therefore, women who want to enter the political arena should be given all the support, leadership positions, and training to create partnerships and develop their skills, especially from the community and political parties.

As political parties mostly acknowledge men's participation in leadership, such an attitude is not given for women in leadership. It turns away women from political parties and forces them to focus on their household work or other activities. The Panchayat Raj act has brought about tremendous changes in Indian states today, regarding women's political leadership. The Panchayati Raj Institution Act has helped more women to enter politics, and hence, men as well have a responsibility to support women and help them gain a foothold in politics.

In Kerala, there is a saying that "Chemmen chadiyal muttolam, pinne chadiyal chatiyolam" (Malayalam), i.e., if a prawn jumps, it can only reach up to our knee level and if the prawns try again to jump higher they will reach for the cooking pot. The saying means that someone trying to do beyond their limits will reach only where they can achieve and never reach their targets. In the case of women's political leadership, in society, this stigma still exists, and men's patriarchy believes that women are as prawns that are trying to reach heights but will never reach their goal. This proverb legitimizes the commonly believed patriarchal notion that women are unfit for leadership. Therefore, as part of this research, it is essential to determine male representative's interventions to support and empower women at the Local Self Government level. The questions were based on how male leaders evaluate women leader's political significance in the panchayat from the Idukki district of Kerala state in India. In order to identify the male representative's role in women's leadership at the Local Self Government, this research has conducted primary interviews with 15 elected male representatives working in various Local Self Governments at the village level as Panchayat presidents/Vice-Presidents/Ward members in the Idukki districts. The table below shows the socio-demographic

characteristics of the male respondents who participated in this study. They were from different panchayats from the Idukki district.

While interviewing the male representatives, one of the significant aspects raised concerns, i.e., gender mainstreaming and equality. The male representatives believed that due to the extended historical context of gender sidelining and gender domination, especially by the male representatives, it is the patriarchal nature. The aspect of gender equality itself is just evolving, and even though the Panchayati Raj Act gives representations, when it comes to the reality, women are still facing various inequalities based on the gender. One respondent stressed the importance of gender mainstreaming and evaluating women's political leadership in India and Kerala:

> As a male leader, I have been working in politics for over 25 years. For centuries, women were segregated from political leadership due to various reasons. Even after implementing the Panchayati Raj Institution Act, women representatives' responsibilities in holding various leadership positions in the panchayat face difficulties and problems in carrying out their duties. Especially in cultural or societal approaches towards women leaders, they believe that women leaders are weaker than male counterparts.
>
> (IM1, P20, 2019)

The respondents as well pointed out that since gender mainstreaming is widely accepted and recognized internationally, gender equality schemes were insufficient to give women more political prominence if they could not correctly solve socio-cultural barriers.

Another aspect of the conversation is the women presidents' diplomacy, decision-making, and negotiation skills at the local self-governance level. The representatives believed the female representatives, especially the presidents, are showing a high level of diplomacy and decision-making abilities that are mainly attributed to their affiliations to the political parties that they are present through, which they got nurtured to have deliberation and rationality. Some of the male representatives as well state that when it comes to the diplomacy and decision-making abilities that the women representatives as presidents inherit, they feel that they are primarily attributed to the political affiliations they were enrolled into. They were incredibly appreciative that they belonged to the same political party, which enabled them to have these skills. While discussing the male perception of the female leader's diplomacy skills at the panchayat, one respondent said:

> In my experience and what I see now in my panchayat, our woman president is very capable of coordinating and increasing the cooperation between different party members at our meetings. Especially, at certain times, we, males, do have a different opinion on policy strategies. Still, our president will critically evaluate and make us understand the importance of the project's specificity. Hence, she does have a greater diplomacy power than men.
>
> (IM2, P14, 2019)

Another male leader commented that he believes his responsibility is to support female colleagues as a male leader. While having the conversation, the male

representatives believed that when it comes to woman empowerment and their participation in political activities, they feel that it is their moral responsibility to support their women counterparts, especially in a place such as the Idukki district. They feel that this is mainly due to the attribution of the region, as most of the activities that people engage in the region are mainly attributed to the agricultural sector. Therefore, they feel that both husband and wife engage in such activities in the agriculture sector. Therefore, the male representatives feel that when it comes to the women's political participation, they face bigger challenges and stress due to their involvement in the political decision-making as a representative as well as being a woman who is responsible for the household and the agricultural activities of the family. Thus, they feel that it is their moral duty to support and share the duties between the male and female counterparts, thereby relieving the women representatives of their stress and enabling them to be more efficient in the administrative and decision-making activities. Men can be involved in various ways to promote women in politics, especially when giving women a higher status and recognition. He said that:

> It is a fact that Idukki district is mainly an area related to agriculture, and even women with leadership qualities cannot enter the political arena. Since women are responsible for assisting the family, especially the husband, in the agricultural work, and taking full responsibility for the household, even those in leadership cannot devote as much time to the political activities. It is a major obstacle. It is a great fact that women working in tea gardens often cannot make the most of their potential to be a part of the events, like Kudumbashree.

(IM3, P35, 2019)

Another aspect, which the male counterparts share while having the conversation, is that for proper involvement of women in the local self-governance and political decision-making, it is necessary to embrace woman to come forward to participate in the electoral process as well as educate the society, especially the family members of the women representatives to promote them and support them while having such activities. Most of their representatives believed that one of the significant constraints they face is convincing the society and family in higher women's participation in the local self-government decision-making. Therefore, they tried to convince society by stating that women are significant and determining factors for the decision-making process due to their humanitarian and compassionate approach and their mechanisms to connect with women, children, and vulnerable section of society. Thus, through these mechanisms, they will be able to get into touch with the real societal issues, which the deprived sections of the society are facing, thereby trying to make significant and corrective changes in those processes. Thus, the male representatives as well act as a significant catalyst for women's political participation, making them a significant societal actor for facilitating changes in the administrative and societal realm. While discussing the men's role in women's political participation and his experience, another respondent said:

> I was doing my best to find young women with different leadership and get them involved in politics as a male ward member. However, it was not easy,

since they did not get sufficient support from their family to enter the political arena, because they think it is a man's career sector. Even if women try to participate in the election at their Local Self Government, she will not win. It is necessary to educate and provide sufficient consultations to the local community to encourage more women's leadership from an early age.

(IM4, P30, 2019)

Another significant aspect of the male representatives that was discussed is the role of women in formulating, implementing, and designing policies at the local self-governance level. The majority believed that women leaders, especially the presidents and board members, have a significant impact on the formulation, designing, and implementation of the policies, especially the policies directed towards the welfare of the minorities, deprived sections, women, and children. They state that this is because women are in constant communication and interaction with the deprived sections of society. They approached women candidates than the male representatives more in expressing their opinions and grievances. Thus, the male representatives feel that the female representatives, especially the presidents and ward members, have a great role and significance in formulating, designing, and implementing policies and programs at the local self-governance level. While discussing the opinion on the role of the elected women representatives in preparing, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies in their panchayat, another respondent acknowledged:

> The role of women representatives in designing and formulating various policies in our panchayat is significant. This is especially true in evaluating the schemes implemented to monitor the policy or program's success or drawbacks in the respective wards. Since the women leaders always communicate daily with the people living in their respective wards, I think it can significantly impact the locality.

(IM5, 58, M, SSLC, Agriculture, P33, 2019)

Furthermore, while trying to understand the role of women, especially regarding their ability to organize and implement programs under the organizational ability, most of the male representatives believed that woman carry forward excellent organizational skills and ability, especially when it comes to the implementation of programs, which were beneficial for the deprived sections of the society. This is because as women representatives, they were in constant contact and communication with the deprived sections; thus, they were able to understand the needs and requirements of the deprived sections, having a clear perception regarding what are the requirements of the deprived sections, great organizational ability to formulate such policies, and implement them at the grassroots level. While reviewing a male perception on evaluating the organizational abilities of women leaders, another respondent said:

> Women leaders are working together to coordinate various activities such as the construction of wells, increase of water resources, prevention of stone masonry activities, protection of women and children, and better utilization of services for the benefit of the people equally as the male Local Self Government leader.

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There was a mixed approach of the male representatives regarding the aspect of political experience of women representatives. There was an opinion that due to the lack of political experience, women representatives could not carry forward and implement such projects that have a big budget and outreach. They feel that the women representatives could not get it forward with such policy measures and did not have much missionary experience. Moreover, they believed that as women leaders and representatives are less corrupt, they could not align with various actors. The latter implemented these big projects due to the corruption, which was involved in such activities. However, another group of male representatives believed that women did not have that much political experience. Still, due to the course of time and experience by working in the local self-governance, they were able to equip and enrich those political experiences, thereby acting as a significant facilitator for political discourse and decision-making, which will benefit the society. While discussing the importance and observation of women's political experience, one respondent said:

> Sometimes, it is less possible for women leaders who are not very experienced in politics to manage the financial costs of raising various big-budget project schemes in the panchayat and raise sufficient financial capacity for it.

Hence, he suggested that having previous political governance experience can be an essential criterion for a successful leader. He as well pointed out that in such situations, the male leader's responsibility is to guide women leaders and work with them to instill the mental courage, sense of responsibility, and knowledge that they need. While discussing conducted special discussions or awareness programs organized at the panchayat for women and girls' protection, preventing any forms of violence against the elderly or younger community, another respondent said:

> I fully acknowledge that not only women leaders, but also male leaders are responsible for running and overseeing offices for the care of the elderly and young, like Pakalveedu, daycare centers, Anganvadi, etc. We as well conduct various awareness programs at educational institutions on gender equality, international women's day celebrations, earth's day, and other important events and Gramasabha meetings. Through such programs, women leaders can share their skills and increase self-identity at the societal level.

While discussing discrimination for the women representatives at the local self-government and the party leadership, most male representatives believed that women representatives face discrimination, as they see it more at the political party level than at the local self-government level. They stated that even though the male representatives or actors would like to dominate in the local self-governance level, when having a woman president, most of them will not dare to make such attempts. Moreover, they believed and admitted that, but in some cases and deliberations, they tried to dominate over women representatives, especially the ward members, in such

discussions and deliberations. However, the majority believed that most of this discrimination towards women happens at the party level due to their lack of political experience and political participation. Most of these women representatives were either nominated or handpicked by the political leadership and their mentors. Thus, in such cases, when the women representatives state their opinion or try to be critical towards the party or political leadership, they can be discriminated by the party members, especially the heads of the party leaders. Another respondent, while discussing the incidences when women leaders face discrimination at the Local Self Government activities or the party level leadership, declared:

> I acknowledged that we often have fewer women leaders entering politics without full cooperation and support of any political party. As a male leader, I noticed that women leaders who come forward as independent candidates often question their confidence if they met any opposition or political parties' obstruction. In such cases, it will affect the women's confidence, and they seem to withdraw from their public services, which they have not been given due to the consideration.
>
> <div align="right">(IM9, P20, 2019)</div>

As a result, even the most talented women leaders with five or six years of service could withdraw from politics without showing interest in the election again. Another aspect regarding the women representatives is the humanitarian nature of women representatives. When it comes to the humanitarian approach, most male representatives stated that they consider women representatives to be more humane, empathetic, and sensible to the issues, especially related to women, children, and other vulnerable sections of the society. They stated that it is mainly attributed to the feminine nature that they have more compassion and caring mentalities than male counterparts. Moreover, most men believed that people from the deprived sections, particularly from women and children, tend to disclose their issues and incidences to a woman representative more than a male representative due to the vulnerability. Thus, it states that when it comes to providing grievances, women representatives have the upper hand rather than the male representatives. While discussing the role of women representative's empathy, sincerity, and compassionate approach, compared to the male counterparts in their developmental actions, one respondent said:

> Women leaders and men leaders have a responsibility to analyze and address various social issues in their panchayat, and I have to agree that women leaders do address a wide range of issues associated with women and children. The main reason could be that if leader is woman, other women who require protection or assistance primarily communicate with the leader. Since community considers that they are safe or their privacy is well kept with this woman, since she is also a woman and a motherly figure.
>
> <div align="right">(IM10, P30, 2019)</div>

In other words, women leaders can interact more with all people in a community, listen and solve their problems with freedom, and the women's ability to deal with such issues at the same time is an excellent proof that they can do well in politics, take the responsibility, and treat others equally. Another respondent said:

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I have to agree that women leaders value themselves as a political representative as well as a representative of their society and hence try their best to open up to the problems of any person who comes to them and give them the guidance and solutions that they need. In other words, a male leader can understand that women leaders look after their panchayat's problems, as if they were dealing with a family, with the same competence to carry out the family's responsibilities; thus, women gain more power and recognition in the society.

(IM11, P20, 2019)

Another aspect regarding women representatives is the popularity of women representatives over male representatives. The male representatives as well believed that female representatives have more popularity than their male counterparts due to their extensive connections and networking. The male representative stated that this is mainly acquired or facilitated through their active participation at the societal level, which was initiated in the beginning as a member of the Kudumbashree and other social, cultural organizations. Thus, while having proper experiences and connections in the Kudumbashree and other social-cultural organizations, women representatives get the necessary encouragement to come forward in order to have political positions and contest for the local self-governance. Thus, it could be seen that coming to politics is not a single step. It has been facilitated by various steps and thereby has more popularity than the male representatives. While discussing the popularity of women leaders at the Local Self Government compared to men and the importance of Kudumbashree/other religious or civil society organizations, another respondent said:

Kudumbashree, an organization working especially for women's socio-economic development, plays a great role in nurturing women as good political leaders, since they are organizing various empowerment events and projects. Many elected women ward members were merely housewives before joining Kudumbashree. After years of being part of it, they realized their abilities and capacities and decided to participate in Local Self Government level elections and won. Hence, Kudumbashree does provide vast opportunities for women to develop their leadership skills.

(IM12, P30, 2019)

Another significant aspect regarding woman empowerment is the previous political experiences of women representatives. There could be seen a mix of reactions from the male representatives regarding previous political experiences of a woman. The first group stated that as women do not have a significant previous political experiences as the male counterparts, but as they have the experience of working in the society through these various social-cultural organizations, as religious, Kudumbashree, they are able to nurture the essential qualities for becoming a political candidate and the necessary social connections, which will facilitate their political career. However, another group believed that as women representatives do not have much previous political experience, this has a determining effect on their effective functioning as they lack political expertise when it comes to the implementation of various policies and programs and the

formulation of various mechanisms for policy and governance. Thus, when it comes to women's previous political experience, the male representatives tend to show different approaches. While discussing the importance of previous political experience for women to succeed in the Local Self Government, another respondent said:

> Having previous experience in politics or leadership in any organization will help women to make decisions at the Local Self Government responsibly and without hesitation, but there are as well women who manage the panchayat administration without any previous political party affiliation or leadership at Kudumbashree, etc.

(IM13, P31, 2019)

Another significant aspect that the women representatives face is the support from the family. Regarding this aspect, the male representatives believed that the family support could be seen as one of the crucial aspects regarding women's political participation, especially the support from the in-laws and husband. Most of the male representatives thought that women representatives face challenges, especially not having proper support from their families in carrying out their administrative duties in the panchayat. Some of them stated that these are most visible during the times of natural calamities when they have to travel for long distances and stay in some hotels or guest houses, and in such situations, rather than appreciating there sacrifice, the family members are questioning their character and morality. Thus, the support of the family can be seen as a significant aspect when it comes to women's political participation. In response to family support, especially the husband's support of a woman who is elected at Local Self Government, another respondent said:

> Working in the political arena for married women depends on their family members, especially their husbands and families. Most ward members commit themselves to family, children care, and Local Self Government activities simultaneously when being women leaders. This requires sheer perseverance and courage along with support from the male colleagues.

(IM14, P25, 2019)

The final significant challenging aspect of women's political participation is the cultural constraints or obstacles for women political leaders. These are mainly in the form of cultural practices, especially in the administrative, cultural practices, regarding corruption and other illegal measures and mechanisms, through which the administrative machinery runs at various levels. They believed that a woman president or a board member mostly would not compromise such corrupt practices, forcing other administrative actors to leave behind women members and formulate policies according to their vested interest. Most of the male representative stated that women find it hard to compromise various corrupt practices that are prevalent in the society at the bureaucratic and administrative levels. These scenarios force them to be kept aside when formulating and implementing policies that have shady mechanisms. Moreover, male representatives believed that the cultural constraints, especially the patriarchal mindset in the society and family as well act as cultural constraints hinder women's political participation and empowerment. While

discussing cultural obstacles for a woman leader, compared to a male political leader, a respondent said:

> Women cannot fully intervene in the affairs of the panchayat without fulfilling their family responsibilities. Some women colleagues face challenges within their party to sanction certain orders or project implementations or financial allocation, since there are many tourist areas. Private companies might try to influence politicians to sanction their illegal needs. In such cases, a strong woman leader can oppose to such plans and deny the business application. This could lead to some opposition. In such cases, other male colleagues could evaluate the decision as 'not mature', 'lack of experience', or 'not brave action', etc. Thus, I think this is firmly a male chauvinistic attitude, and such a culture should stay away from transparent politics.

(IM15, P10, 2019)

Thus, the elected male representatives promote and accept the Panchayati Raj Institution policy in the Idukki district, since it increases women's active participation in political leadership. Various socio-political, economic, and religious restrictions and transitions create more barriers for women to enter politics in every society. The respondents pointed out that one of the significant problems that women leaders face is that if they want to manage the family's affairs and the activities of a panchayat at the same time; they need the full support of their own family. In certain exceptional situations, such as natural disasters or pandemics, all the leaders must associate day and night to safeguard their community members when working on emergencies. The interview revealed that during those emergencies, if required, the male leaders are always helping and taking care of women and taking them home safely. The interviewed men as well said that they give all possible support to women in various political parties and multiple debates to prioritize women leaders' opinions and respect their suggestions or requirements.

The male leaders revealed that they are proud to support women leaders in achieving their panchayat development's common goal. The male leaders fully acknowledged that women gained more political prominence through the Panchayati Raj Institution system than men. Various forms of development and leadership of women can be maximized for the improvement of society. The interview as well revealed that the male leaders are at the forefront of harnessing their skills and administration to address the barriers of women's political representation in any way and make them aware of the importance that they need in society by joining them. They acknowledged that everyone has an equal share in forming and implementing various developmental issues in a panchayat, regardless of gender. Therefore, they remain supportive of male leaders in supporting decisions made by women leaders and making the necessary changes. Some respondents agreed that women leaders work with precision, compassion, and empathy at certain times, without any segregation. Thus, the support and recognition that women leaders get from the people in a society are enormous.

As Von Rueden et al. (2018) have found, women and men vary in the access to political leadership due to sexual selection and activities related to parenting, status

rivalry, and coalition building. The divisions of influence in societies account for men's greater access to political leadership while limiting women's access to leadership. Another study by Kamau (2010) identified that NGOs and other organizations should continue to provide the logistical assistance to women aspirants in their campaigns, recognize the costly nature of a campaign that are usually financially disadvantaged concerning men. The deployment of community mobilizers in women's campaigns are crucial as well. In this research, male leaders identified that various religious or social organizations, including Kudumbashree, can promote and motivate women to engage in social activities and become candidates in the elections.

Another important factor that encourages more women to choose a political career is the support of the political parties. As Jalozai (2008) points, if more women are interested in politics, proper institutional mechanisms will be important depending on the region. Therefore, in this research, male leaders as well identify that their concerned political party and party leaders must support women for the higher positions within the party itself that women would increase their confidence and use their administration skills properly. It will help them to identify their values. This study has found that even if a woman leader in the panchayat was considered more important than male leader, the male colleagues had no jealousy or illegitimate competition; instead, male leaders were delighted with the way women were treated in the society. The male leaders as well said that if there are any circumstances, especially personal circumstances, when a woman leader with good leadership qualities cannot participate in the next election because of the issues, as a responsible male leader, they will do their best to bring women back into politics if necessary by holding personal discussions with her family. In other words, this study shows that male leaders can support women leaders in all possible ways, regardless of whether they are from the opposition party or not. Therefore, the Idukki district's study reveals that the elected male representatives consider women equal and trust their leadership abilities at their respective panchayats.

This chapter concludes the empirical study results on women's political empowerment through leadership. Women's political empowerment in the global context and women's political engagement and leadership explicitly promote women's human rights and elevate their status. Having women more active in leadership and decision-making is beneficial for improving the economy and society. Gender equality is a founding concept of the Indian Constitution, essential to the preamble, fundamental rights, and fundamental duties. The Constitution gives women equal rights with men and encourages the state to take action to support women.

In the context of a democratic polity, there have been legislation, plans, and programs designed to advance women's positions in the society. In the Fifth Five Year Plan's aftermath, there was a change in women's problems rather than welfare. Nowadays, women's role as a critical issue in defining women's status is highlighted by the National Commission for Women implementation of the Act of Parliament to protect women's rights. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to India's Constitution have provided reservations for seats in Panchayat and Municipal

Councils for women, paving the groundwork for their involvement in local government decision-making.

The first research objective was on women's political empowerment in India with various statistical records. It as well identified the importance of encouraging more women to choose a political career in India. It has shown the importance of Indian Panchayati Raj Institution's policy and how it increased women's opportunity to be the leaders of a panchayat in Kerala. It has elaborated the number of female leaders in Kerala's local self-government institutions.

The second objective results show that women at the panchayat show political leadership traits defined by Northouse. The obtained findings as well show that these traits are associated with four essential domains: governance, political participation, decision-making capacity, administrative skills, and influencing capacity. The Panchayati Raj Institution policy has given women an amicable way to use their reservation scheme to participate in politics. More women can use their leadership skills and traits through this Panchayati Raj Institution policy, which can apply to the individuality and society's overall development. The findings prove that women at the panchayat's local self-government institutions have strong leadership traits, helping them to be active political leaders; through this, they must achieve political empowerment.

The third objective, which is to find out the social and cultural challenges of elected women representatives, shows that the critical social and cultural challenges of women politicians are mainly categorized into patriarchy, sexism, economic inequality, access to equal opportunities, lack of respect, family structure, workplace discrimination, lack of knowledge about gender equality in the society, lack of mentors in politics, individual mindset, dependency on the specific party, feeling safe in a political career, feeling involved and engaged, feeling valued, feeling influential, feeling authentic, and honoring diversity, etc. These critical challenges are the main reasons that prevent women from being active in a political career, thereby becoming a significant block for more women to be politically empowered. Therefore, the study shows that it is essential that all these critical social and cultural challenges should be reduced, thereby increasing gender equality in political careers for women in Kerala.

The fourth study object, which is to identify women's political leadership through the men's perspective, shows that in the Idukki district, male elected representatives at the panchayat accept and agree with the importance of women's active participation in a political career. The result as well shows that with the male perspective, they believe that the local self-government institutions must make new policies to make awareness about gender equality, especially the youth, and educate students in institutions to be aware of the gender policies. The male elected members as well said that male colleagues have a more prominent role in promoting and supporting female leaders at the panchayat governance without discrimination based on gender and accepting their leadership. The result shows that the male representatives positively approach women's political leadership and believe that women are politically empowered in Panchayati Raj Institution's policy.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL ALIGNMENT

Regarding the theoretical and empirical alignment of the research, i.e., the theoretical aspects regarding women's political empowerment through leadership positions in Panchayati Raj Institutions and its empirical part, there is a proper alignment of the theoretical and empirical part regarding women's political participation through a leadership position. It could be seen that all four theories for this study: participation and democratic theory, leadership theory, liberal feminism, and theory of intersectional feminism, have been correctly aligned with the empirical part regarding women's political empowerment through leadership position at the panchayat level. Regarding the first objective of the research, which is to conceptualize women's political empowerment through leadership at the local self-government, a research has been done to identify how women's political empowerment through leadership happens at the local self-government, and all four theories, participation and democratic theory, leadership theory, liberal feminism, and theory of intersectional feminism, has been taken into consideration to understand their significance.

The first theory in this regard is the participation and democratic theory, which looks at how citizen participation in the democratic process can enrich their lives and well-being. It could be seen that as women participate in the decision-making process in the Panchayati Raj at the local self-government, through women's empowerment in political participation, it ensures that a woman had a determined aspect or role in formulating policies that shape their lives in this society. In order to understand and analyze such aspects, the study has taken research documents and archives of Panchayati Raj Institutions policy documents and deliberations, which show the significance of changes that are happening at the local self-governance level through the women's participation in a leadership position. Thus, it shows that when it comes to the aspect of participation and democratic theory and its practical implication of women's political participation through leadership positions, it ensures the participation and democratic theory impact on women's lives, thereby enhancing their decision-making capacities' impact on their lives.

Another significant theory that has been taken to analyze the objective one regarding women's political empowerment through leadership position at the local self-government, is the liberal feminism theory. This theoretical framework emphasizes the significance of equality between men and women, thereby advancing gender parity. The theory of liberal feminism emphasized the need for women's political empowerment through leadership positions, making significant improvements in the life and well-being of a woman in the society. Regarding a nation, such as India, it has been noted that the gender inequality was deep-rooted in society due to the long history and patriarchal mindset. Exploring the women's political participation in leadership positions through the lens of liberal feminism provides significant insights. Through liberal feminism, the research looks at how political empowerment can happen or facilitate women's political participation through a leadership position. Thus, the women's participation in the political

process through the leadership position enables them to overcome the long-lasting inequalities perpetrated towards the women in this society, especially by the male counterparts. Thus, this process ensures that women will significantly represent society, enabling them to formulate policies and measures to impact their lives and well-being. In order to understand the alignment of the theory with the empirical part, the chapter focuses on the analysis of documents and archives on the history of the local self-government and its implementation mechanisms. It shows that the liberal feminism theory has a great alignment due to the gender equality or parity that a woman was able to facilitate through the local self-government due to the woman's participation at the political level in leadership positions. Thus, when it comes to the alignment of the liberal feminism theory, it has a great alignment towards the empirical part, thereby providing significant momentum to the woman equality and gender parity in the society through women's leadership position in the Panchayat Raj institutions.

Another significant theory, which has been used to understand the first objective for looking at the women's political empowerment through leadership position at the local self-government, was the intersectional feminism theory. The theory of intersectional feminism states that even though there are various kinds of discrimination and inequalities, which are existing in the society, but there is an underlying connection, which connects all these inequalities to a common objective. It can be seen that the first objective of political empowerment through leadership position is that even though there was a significant challenge that women faced in getting the leadership position, but from the realistic perception, it can be seen that even though it was looking at the single objective of getting into the leadership position, there are various kinds of inequalities or hindrances, such as patriarchy, public mindset, questioning the quality and efficiency of women in leadership, etc. Even though the aspect is looking at the single objective of how to get women into leadership, there is an underlying connection between all these inequalities and attributes, which connect together with the concept of women's political empowerment through leadership at the local self-government level. Therefore, looking through the lens of intersectional feminism into the first objective, it has a significant attribute to pursue how women's political empowerment through leadership position can be evaluated.

The final theoretical framework that was used for the first objective when looking at the women's political empowerment through leadership position in the local self-government was the leadership theory by Northouse. The leadership theory focuses on the aspect of enhancement of leadership in a person through their participation in the democratic process, through which its attributes of intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability were installed in a leader, which it enabled them to function as a significant social actor, making considerable progress and outcomes in the society. Thus, the leadership theory and its attributes enable women representatives to equip themselves with all the attributes of a good leader through their participation in the political process. It makes significant enhancement for gender equality in this society. It can be seen that the women's political participation as presidents of the panchayat enables them to accomplish all

the attributes of the leadership theory, thereby having the requirements for them to function as a rational actor for making political changes, which will have a positive attribute towards women and gender equality in the society. Thus, for analyzing the alignment between the theory and practice, the objective one investigates the institutional documents and archives, thereby seeing that through the leadership theory and its attributes, women were able to enhance themselves in the political sphere as responsible presidents and make significant policy mechanisms for the enrichment of gender equality. Thus, what concerns the objective one, all the four theories have been significantly aligned with the empirical part, thereby showing that the theories have a meaningful impact on this research and its empirical understanding.

Regarding the second objective of this research, which is to identify the leadership traits of elected women representatives and analyze how it strengthens their leadership at the panchayat, the theory of leadership by Northouse has been taken for analyzing its significance about women political empowerment. There can be seen the alignment of the theory with the empirical part: the theory of leadership has been appropriately aligned within the empirical path on women's political empowerment at the panchayat as the presidents of panchayat. In order to understand the significance of the leadership theory, an empirical study has been conducted with 25 elected women representatives as the Presidents of the Panchayat from the selected district. It can be seen that what concerns women's political empowerment through leadership position, the majority of women representatives believed that the leadership traits of intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability enables them to be a successful woman political representative at the local self-governance.

What concerns the first leadership trait of intelligence, women representatives believed that through the participation in the political process, such as being a member of a political party and then getting elected to the local self-governance, as a president they were able to enrich their intelligence aspect with the experience through the local self-governance process. They have developed interpersonal communication skills, emotional intelligence, human rights activism, and various other intelligence traits through the intelligence aspect. They developed a sense of belonging to the community, thereby acting as a significant catalyst for change in the community development process. Moreover, they state that being a woman President, they have a more approachable attitude of the society, thereby trying to reach the vulnerable sections of the society, such as women, children, and deprived sections, stating their grievances to the women presidents. Thus, through this process, they understood the significant issues of society, thereby trying to formulate mechanisms through their intelligence aspect and its various characteristics, facilitating significant policy mechanisms and changes to overcome these grievances. Thus, one of the significant characteristic traits of the leadership of intelligence has a significant role regarding the women's political participation at the leadership position in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, thereby acting as a significant catalyst for social change.

Another significant leadership trait is the self-confidence aspect that the women leaders possess through their participation in the political process and at the local self-governance as women presidents. The women presidents believed that self-confidence enables them to take various innovative measures about women's political empowerment and societal well-being in the public policy decision-making processes. Moreover, they believed that as a district that is always prone to natural calamities, the attribute of self-confidence enables them to formulate mechanisms and policy measures quickly and drastically, thereby trying to save the lives and reduce the calamities and casualties. Thus, through this process, they were able to act swiftly, understanding the needs of the time, thus having a situational approach towards various issues about women's political empowerment and societal development at the panchayat level. Moreover, they state that through self-confidence, they were able to motivate themselves and the society at large through public speeches and charismatic leadership positions, thus acting as a significant social change facilitator that will motivate the depressed sections of the society to approach them in order to get rid of their grievances.

Another significant characteristic trait of the leadership position is the determining aspect. The women representatives as well believed that the leadership position through determination enabled them to take significant societal measures and policy mechanisms towards various societal issues. This is particularly significant for the Idukki district with many vulnerabilities because of the natural calamities and various diverse ethnic and linguistic groups and their social tensions. The determination aspect enables them to take robust measures to combat such scenarios and try to make equilibrium and peace in the society. These are primarily in the forms of violence prevention and other mechanisms, which restore order in this society. Furthermore, being empathetic and humane, they could hear the grievances of the deprived sections of society and take measures to alleviate such grievances. Moreover, through the mechanism of constant social presence and public discussion mechanisms, they ensure that they were constantly connected to the society, thereby trying to get rid of the grievances of society at large. Thus, through these determination mechanisms, the society and public have confidence in the women presidents and their decision-making abilities, thereby aligning to their ideas and trying to implement them at the societal level, ensuring peace and stability in society's democratic process.

Another significant characteristic trait of the political leadership is the aspect of integrity. Through the integrity mechanism, women presidents ensure transparency in the administration, thereby keeping the aspect of corruption and other evils of democracy away from the administrative and bureaucratic processes. Through integrity, the women presidents as well ensure that they have been accountable and approachable by the society to get rid of their grievances and ensure peace and stability in the society. It enables them to act transparently, thereby facilitating administrative processes in a fair and accountable manner, which will benefit society at large, rather than benefiting someone, as intermediaries who benefit from such administrative and bureaucratic processes. Through integrity, they were able to have organizational coordination and control of duties, thereby ensuring

that various departments of the administrative process have been appropriately coordinated and there is a control of duties of various actors, ensuring transparency in the administration without corrupt practices. Thus, through these mechanisms, the women presidents ensure that transparency has been facilitated in the administrative and bureaucratic process, benefiting the societal actors rather than some intermediaries and other shady political actors. Moreover, a woman president stated that as they have a great integrity aspect and less corrupted practices, the political actors and other corrupt members or intermediaries did not dare to approach them to have some favorable mechanisms.

The final aspect regarding the leadership position is the sociability of the women representatives or Presidents. Women representatives or presidents believed in a leadership position through political participation. The sociability aspect has a significant role in ensuring leadership position and its administrative process in the society. Regarding the sociability aspect, women leaders believed in being pleasant, friendly, and having a warm approach. Women are sensible to the issues of the public in the society, and the public at large felt it easier to approach women presidents, thereby stating their fundamental needs of the society and grievances that they are facing in their day-to-day lives. This enables women political leaders, as presidents, to formulate such policy mechanisms, which will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of the society at large. This shows that being pleasant and friendly enables the public to connect to the woman president rather than having a sense of fear and being less approachable. This enables them to formulate policies and measures with a futuristic approach and a visionary mechanism by creating innovative policy mechanisms that will have a long-lasting impact on the overall society. This is particularly evident in the case of the Idukki district, as being vulnerable to the environmental issues as well socially sensitive due to various diversified communities, religious and linguistic groups. Thus, through the mechanism of sociability, they were able to understand and perceive the real needs of the society and formulate such mechanisms and measures, which will have a far-reaching impact and change the current inhibiting factors and mechanisms, thereby ensuring social justice.

Thus, through the mechanisms of leadership theory by Northouse, the women's political participation through the leadership positions at the Panchayati Raj Institutions enabled them to enrich and occupy all the leadership qualities, thereby acting as a significant political actor. Thus, considering the attributes and characteristics mentioned above, the female Presidents of the Panchayat state that the leadership qualities facilitate them to perform their duties responsibly, significantly impacting society. Thus, it can be seen that the theory of leadership has been properly aligned with the empirical aspect of women's empowerment through political leadership at the local self-governance level.

Regarding the third objective, which looks at the social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership, this object has been studied from the liberal feminism theory. In order to understand the alignment between the theory and the empirical part, the empirical analysis has been conducted with 25 women presidents, regarding the social and cultural challenges they face as presidents and panchayat

leaders. As liberal feminism advocates for equality between men and women regarding social, cultural, and political equality, evaluating the social-cultural challenges with liberal feminism enables to understand the significant challenges that women face in the society, even in the leadership positions, socially and culturally. Most women representatives believed in political leadership, even though they were respected because of their political positions in the panchayat and society. However, when it comes to the social-cultural aspect, they still face significant challenges regarding this.

Regarding the social-cultural challenges, one of the significant challenges is the patriarchal mindset in this society, particularly in the family, especially in the form of lack of support from the family members, the in-laws, and husband when conducting their functions and duties as a woman president of the panchayat. Most of women believed that rather than being cordial and supportive of their attitudes and ideas, these family members were mostly hesitant to support their mechanisms and were suspicious and skeptical towards such ideas. Women representatives believed that these are most evident in case of incidences, in which women representatives must work longer hours and travel long distances, especially during the times of natural calamities and scenarios when they must cooperate with their male counterparts and even live in hotels and apartments. Then, the family members started making rumors and were skeptical towards such mechanisms. The women representatives believed that these kinds of skepticism and rumors are not limited to the family and society. The opposition parties as well make rumors regarding such incidences and try to defame them in society. Another aspect of this is the family members' lack of support, especially in domestic and administrative duties. This is specifically evident in the case of the Idukki district. A woman is performing family duties as well as administrative duties. As it is an agricultural area, they must perform their duties as an agricultural supply laborer for the family plantations. Thus, they find it time-consuming to conduct all these activities, especially in taking care of the children, the in-laws, and administrative duties. Thus, most women believed that rather than being supportive and sharing duties, the in-laws and husbands were incredibly hesitant to make supporting attitudes in such scenarios.

Another significant social-cultural challenge is regarding the lack of support and sidelining nature by the male representatives. Most of the women representatives believed that even though they hold the position of the President, they have not faced any such scenarios perpetrated towards them. Still, when it comes to sidelining by the male representatives, these are particularly visible towards the woman ward members. These were particularly present during the meetings and deliberations. Their ideas have been sidelined or subjugated by a significant majority of the higher male voices, thereby trying to accomplish their ideas in such meetings and deliberations. Moreover, when it comes to the allocation of funding for various wards, due to the vast majority of the male representatives, they tried to get more allocation of funds even though the administration is headed by a woman President. Thus, in the administrative mechanisms, women as well face significant social, cultural constraints and challenges, especially with allocating funds and getting representation of their voices in the administrative bodies.

Another significant social-cultural constraint for women representatives is their representation in the political parties, which they represent. It can be seen that even though they belong to the political parties and get selected to the local self-governments through such political parties, their representation in such parties and the significance of their ideas is fewer, compared to the male political party members. This can be attributed to the power structure and the patriarchal mindset of the political parties in India, especially in Kerala. Since these women representatives were either handpicked or selected by the political parties and have been nurtured and nourished by them, they find it less appealing to hear the ideas raised by such women representatives. Thus, in the political parties, a woman faces significant challenges and constraints at the socio-cultural level.

Another significant socio-cultural challenge that the women representatives face is technological abuse and cyberbullying. According to the female representatives, these are mostly perpetrated by the members of the opposite political parties and those anti-social elements in the society that try to defame the female representatives. Most of the women representatives believed in cyberbullying and sexual abuse, and these are mostly perpetrated towards women political representatives rather than male political representatives. These are perpetrated by extracting photos from the social media and other applications, morphing them, and making them wrong in front of the community. Moreover, women representatives believed that even though they eventually find out that this fake, society prefers to take these as serious allegations rather than fake allegations at the time of these incidences. This can be attributed to the patriarchal mindset of the society.

Thus, regarding the alignment of the research objective 3, the social-cultural challenges faced by the women representatives, especially the Presidents, there is a proper alignment between the theory and the empirical part regarding this, as the theory tried to provide equal opportunities and representation for both male and women representatives by stating the social-cultural challenges that women representatives face in the society. It shows that there is still a lack of gender equality in the Kerala society and the need for significant changes concerning such challenges by trying to elevate such challenges for the women in the society.

Another significant theoretical alignment can be found with the third objective regarding intersectional feminism. As the third objective looks into the aspect of social, cultural challenges faced by the women representatives, it can be seen that the intersectional feminism has a great significance in this regard. This is particularly due to the fact that the intersectional feminism advocates that even though there is significant discrimination towards a particular objective but there has been an underlying connection to various discriminating attributes in the society. Even though the social cultural challenges are directed towards women's leadership, these are not dictated by a particular aspect, as there are multiple aspects, which lead to the discrimination, such as patriarchal mindset, bullying, and sidelining women representatives with abusive statements via cyber platforms, the pessimistic attitude of the male representative towards the quality and ability of women to carry forward the leadership attributes, etc. Thus, the third objective clearly aligns to the theoretical framework of the intersectional feminism.

The final objective is to identify woman's political representation through the male's perspective. In order to identify this, the empirical analysis has been conducted with 15 male representatives in the same district. In order to understand the alignment between the theoretical and empirical level, the theory of liberal feminism and the theory of intersectional feminism have been employed to identify how much equality and representation have been given to women in comparison to men.

Most of the male representatives believed there is a considerable progress in the Kerala society, especially at the local self-government, with the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the representation of women through such legislations. Thus, most male representatives believed in having equality for people at the local self-government. Moreover, they were delighted with the administrative capabilities of women representatives, especially Presidents, in governance and decision-making. Most of the men believed that there is a tremendous amount of transparency in the administrative process when it comes to the administration due to the lack of corruption and integrity facilitated by the women representatives. Thus, they state that it is complicated for the intermediaries or other actors to meddle with the women representatives in such scenarios, thereby diverting the funding and allocation for other purposes. Therefore, the male representatives were highly vocal and appreciated the administrative transparency envisaged by the woman in the local self-government administration.

Another aspect in which the male representatives were highly appreciative and vocal of the women representatives is regarding the approachability of the society towards women representatives. These were primarily due to the friendly and humane mechanism envisaged by the women representatives, in which the society finds it appealing for them to approach women representatives. The male representative as well stated that this enables or facilitates getting to know the significant issues perpetrated in society, especially towards the depressed and vulnerable sections such as women and children. Thus, through such a mechanism, the women representatives come to contact with the issues that society is facing, thereby trying to envisage policy mechanisms to elevate such grievances. Moreover, the male representatives state that when it comes to the natural calamities or other forms of violence, women representatives were more responsive to such scenarios, taking swift measures to overcome such casualties and reduce such calamities. According to the male representatives, these are as well attributed to the humane and compassionate attitudes of the female representatives towards various social-cultural incidences.

Regarding the social-cultural threat, the male representatives as well share almost similar perceptions regarding the social-cultural challenges faced by the female representatives. These include society's patriarchal mindset, especially the family members and in-laws of the women representatives and their duties and actions. The male representatives had a similar opinion when it comes to the support for the decision-making and administrative duties; they get less support from the family members, especially the in-laws and husbands. Moreover, they were concerned about the aspect of the lack of time when it comes to performing the

administrative duties, because unlike the male representatives, the female representatives must carry forward the work of the Panchayat and the family duties together with the farm duties, which the family members were allocated.

Another significant challenge that the male representatives raised is the defamation towards the female representatives, especially in the society. The male representatives believed that these were perpetrated during natural calamities when the female representatives traveled together with the male representatives for long distances and even days to find solutions to the depressed sections of the society inflicted by such natural calamities. The male representative stated that rather than being appreciated to such measures, the society tried to be skeptical towards such scenarios and tried to defame the female representatives and make a character assassination of such female representatives. Thus, they stated that even though they try to educate the society regarding this, due to various social-cultural mindsets and patriarchal aspects, they tend to get a less positive response from the society regarding this aspect. Moreover, they believed that these kinds of character assassination had been perpetrated by the society in such instances and through various scrupulous elements in the society by social media activities. They tried to defame the woman by making character assassination. Thus, the male representatives believed that even though the women representatives could get significant representation in the local self-government bodies and political parties through the legislation of PRA; however, when it comes to the social and cultural challenges, they still face significant social and cultural challenges towards female representatives. Thus, the male representatives believed that there should be significant reformative mechanisms that need to be taken in this society regarding society's attitude towards female representation in the political sphere. Thus, there is a proper alignment between the theoretical and empirical part regarding the objective for looking at the perception of the male representatives towards female counterparts.

Thus, according to the above-mentioned statements by the male representatives, they as well enshrine the idea of equality of women together with men, which shows the significant alignment of liberal feminism in this regard. Moreover, as the male representatives try to eradicate discrimination and change the mindset of the society, especially the patriarchal mindset, it could be seen that they advocate for the idea and stand sincerely together with women representatives and the leadership position to enhance their representation at the local self-governance level. Furthermore, the male representatives pointed out, various inequality's prevalent in the society, especially the patriarchal mindset, questioning the ability of one in the leadership positions. Thus, it can be seen that the theory of intersectional feminism as well gets a significant highlight in this regard. It is particularly due to the fact that the intersectional feminism advocates that the discriminatory approaches are not singular and there is an underlying connection, which connects all of them towards a common objective. Thus, it can be seen that at the final objective, both the theory of liberal feminism and intersectional feminism have a great significance and alignment towards the objective.

Thus, it can be concluded that when it comes to the aspect of theoretical alignment towards empirical part, all the four objectives fulfilled the alignment and correlation between the theory and empirical part, thus stating that there is a significant aspect of theoretical alignment towards the woman's political representation through leadership position at the panchayat Raj institutions.
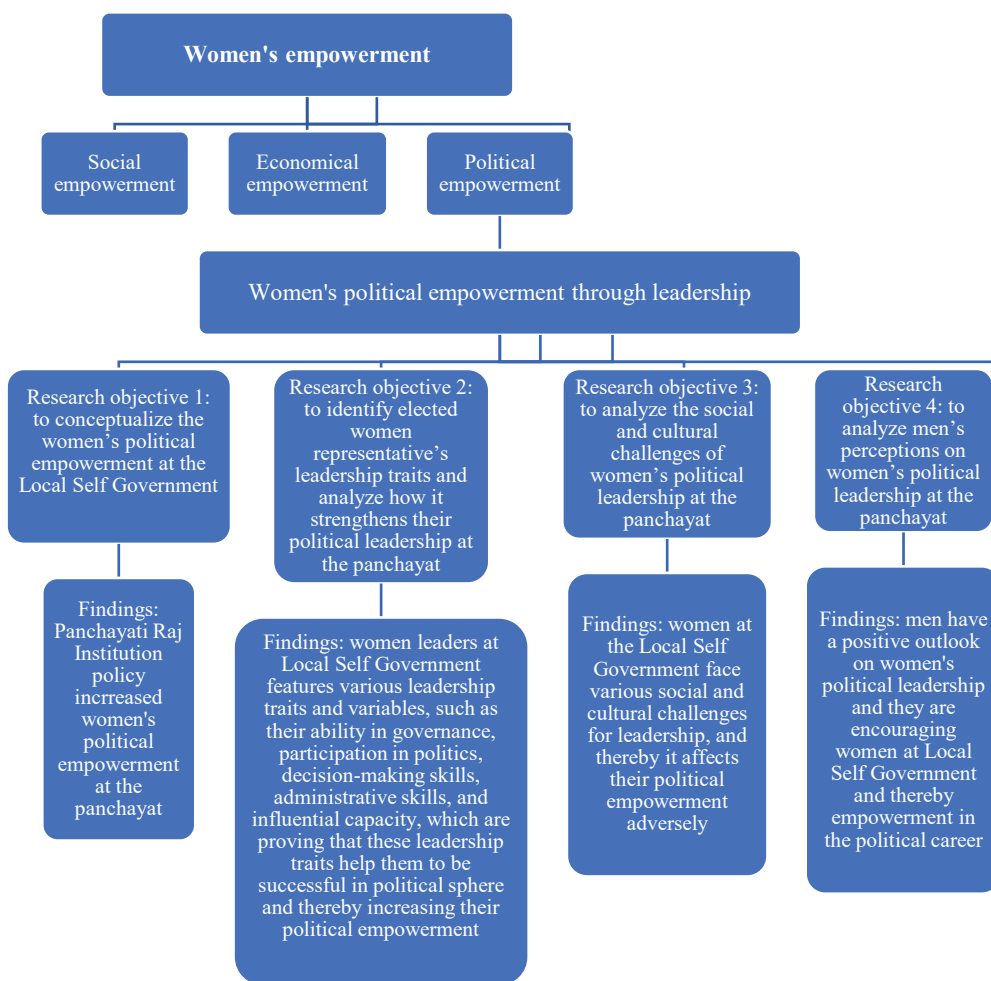

Figure 17. Research findings

Source: created by the author

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS

1. The first objective of this research was to conceptualize women's political empowerment at the local level via the Panchayati Raj Institution's policy. The study results show that after implementing the PRI policy, more women could have power in Kerala's politics, which enabled their political empowerment. When 50% of women and 50% of men are working in a local body, the decentralizing power to the local government creates a situation where women and men can participate in democratic development with political importance. Therefore, the Panchayati Raj system's policies are fundamental in India and ensure women's importance. The political participation helps empower women and allows women to have equal importance in making formal and informal decisions. While making various political decisions, it is critical to work for the improvement of marginalized societies. In all the local bodies and the panchayats, women leaders will be able to implement developmental policies through their leadership, despite their political background or experience in politics. Thus, the policy of the Panchayati Raj Institution will give women leaders more chances to show their leadership skills. In this first objective, one of the significant theoretical alignments can be seen with regard to the liberal feminism. As the concept of liberal feminism advocates for equal representation of women and men through legal measures, it can be seen that granting reservation for members at the local self-governance through leadership by the implementation of the Panchayati Raj Act of 1991 carry forward the novel idea of liberal feminism. This ensures that woman will get equal representation along with men at the political sphere at the local self-government through leadership. The significance of liberal feminism regarding the first objective is that as liberal feminism advocates the representation and participation of women together with men at the political level, it implies that this political representation and equal participation should be at the public sphere as well rather than at the private sphere. Moreover, it can be seen that this justifies the idea of Panchayati Raj Act of 1991 as woman's representation and equal participation through leadership is provided at the public sphere and the political realm. Therefore, the idea of liberal feminism clearly aligns with the concept of the first objective.

2. The second objective was to identify the elected women's leadership traits and analyze how they strengthen their political leadership at the panchayat. The results prove that women in the local self-government have strong leadership traits and are politically empowered. First, a political leader's essential leadership traits are being intelligent and participating in the political arena well. A person must be confident that he/she is a good leader. Only when a person has confidence, she/he can perform his/her responsibilities with a more practical ability when faced with various tasks. A politically active leader must have social skills if his/her work for the well-being of all people is to be adequately implemented without any segregation. A leader can

analyze and find solutions to their work area's needs and if needed, provide intervention. It is important that only a person who can influence people at different societal levels can make an excellent political activist and leader. Therefore, any leader in the political arena must be recognized in the community, dedicated to the people, and have goodwill among the people for their political needs. Thus, only a leader who has a pleasant and charismatic personality can influence people in the community. Another aspect is that any leader's essential political characteristics are confidence, analyzing one's strengths, and building confidence and self-esteem. Particularly in a panchayat, when it comes to making various decisions, a leader must be confident in his/her ability. Only a confident leader can bring together multiple colleagues who work with him to make the community better. This study suggests that a woman leader needs the cooperation and support of the community, her family, and various individuals and colleagues in her daily life for this to happen.

In terms of the leadership traits of the elected female representatives, the results show that a leader who validates and strengthens political leadership through determination is accepted in the society very well. Their determination to make decisions helps a leader to complete a task. Only one decisively capable leader can fulfill his/her responsibilities, stand firm in any crisis, and resolve the issues. A leader needs to clearly understand what he/she is doing and have the determination to accomplish it, if he/she is diligent and focused on his/her responsibilities, working together for a common goal, and bringing innovative ideas into administration. Simultaneously, a determined and sincere leader can only get others, especially his/her colleagues and people from different spheres, to encourage them and implement ideas. Especially in a variety of natural disasters and epidemics, a leader must act with grit and determination. In a panchayat with such a variety of differences and distinctions, the village head will decide whether it is indeed time for a leader who thoroughly analyzes and treats all people's needs. Therefore, it is a fact that through conversations with women leaders, the author of the dissertation has understood that the integrity must be the most important trait for a leader to work in politics. Only a leader who can engage in a cooperative society can be sensitive, know others' needs, express concern for their welfare, and implement various policy amendments is a good leader. In order to be a strong political leader, they need to interact with people to demonstrate their leadership qualities. In the end, a charismatic leadership is a much-needed personality trait for a leader in politics. An active and productive attitude characterizes a charismatic leader: identifying great people's qualities, analyzing his/her leadership effectively, and making changes. In such case, only a charismatic leader can correct the wrongdoings of the society. A charismatic political leader can exist in an exemplary society, perform moral actions, and be known as the people's beloved leader. A charismatic political leader can as well unite followers, guide others, extend the freedom of expression, and instill good behavior. At the same time, a charismatic leader

can plan and successfully negotiate with top-level departments and officials. Therefore, women leaders at the local self-government have strong leadership traits and are politically empowered through their abilities, such as intelligence, confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability at their panchayat. These traits help them do their panchayat jobs well, especially when it comes to governance, political participation, panchayat decision-making, improved administrative skills, and having a significant say in the society and other parts of the government.

With regard to the second objective, the concept of liberal feminism has great significance as well. The essential objective of liberal feminism was to empower women at all levels of public sphere, whether it is education, health care, or political participation. It could be seen that through the Panchayati Raj Act of 1991, the women's political representation has been insured, thereby providing them a considerable number of opportunities to get to the public sphere. They were able to develop various abilities through this representation, such as leadership, confidence, determination, charismatic aspects, which will enable them to be a good leader and provide various developmental measures for the society. Moreover, one of the significant aspects, which can be attributed to liberal feminism, is that even though liberal feminism did not give much significance to the aspect of heteronormative attributes or the aspect of patriarchy in the society, but this study tries to see how the aspect of patriarchy tries to influence women's political leadership and inhibit them in the political process. Therefore, it can be seen that both the positive traits of liberal feminism have been considered as well as the drawbacks of liberal feminism have been fully taken into consideration by trying to see how this negative aspect can be avoided and rectified through the empirical research.

3. The third objective was to analyze the social and cultural challenges of women's political leadership at the panchayat. The results explain the social and cultural problems that the elected women in local self-government have to deal with. The results show that there are various challenges, such as patriarchy, sexism, economic inequality, access to equal opportunities, lack of respect, family structure, workplace discrimination, lack of knowledge about gender equality in society, lack of mentors in politics, individual mindset, dependency on the specific party, feeling safe, feeling involved and engaged, feeling valued, feeling influential, feeling authentic and honoring diversity, cultural sensitivity of women's leadership, community-level segregation, other religious organizations' interference, limited access to higher leadership, stereotypes, lack of proper attention to women leaders, lack of time, stress, violence against women leaders, lack of flexibility, gender barriers, masculinity, and fear of cyber abuse, that are preventing women from being active in a political career. Therefore, these challenges significantly negatively impact the political empowerment of women. Various female leaders that participated in the interviews stated that the female leaders need to work harder than the male leaders to gain public respect and goodwill. On the other occasions, the female leaders said that there would be little support for them if

there were disagreements about the top officials. All female leaders need to be mentally ready and willing to face all their problems with courage.

One of the most critical issues discussed in this study is various psychological and physical harassment scenarios against women in politics, such as neglection and exploitation by the people themselves or multiple parties. Some of the leaders who participated in this study have openly stated that cultures that harbor malicious and harmful personalities can harm women, primarily through the media mechanisms. It is every woman's responsibility to participate actively in the upcoming elections and re-enter the leadership position. It is as well essential to understand that women are shifting away from the political work today due to the degradation and humiliation they experience in various social forms. Therefore, women's full political participation and sustainable political development can only be achieved if men and women work together to provide full support. Women leaders who participated in this study have formulated different policies for their panchayat's development process, thus establishing friendly relations with the top officials, showing that women leaders influence the political arena. At the same time, female leaders are more likely to emphasize protecting women, children, and the elderly due to their compassionate nature. The study as well found that women leaders are conducting women's empowerment programs to combat the increasing violence in the society and empower women and children with higher education and self-defense. Therefore, female leaders can understand and solve all exceptional skills problems better than men through their charisma. As a result, this study is significant from the research point of view. Based on this study, the Panchayati Raj is a very important part of how women leaders can make a difference in politics.

Another concept, which needs particular significance in this context, is the intersectional feminism. As the third objective tries to see various qualities that women political leaders develop through their leadership positions, it can be seen that one of the significant constraints for them to develop these qualities are the deep-rooted patriarchal mindset and male domination in this society. Thus, the concept of intersectional feminism gathers significance. According to the intersectional feminism, it can be seen that even though the discrimination is related to a particular concept such as gender, as in the case of this research, it is the male domination of the society and its patriarchal mindset, but it can be seen that there is a deep rooted and underlying connection which leads to this concept of patriarchal male domination and the subjugation of women at the political and social cultural realm. Therefore, through the lens of intersectional feminism, the study on women's leadership through political institutions has a great significance in this third objective.

4. The fourth objective was to analyze men's perceptions of women's political leadership at the panchayat and show men's perception of gender equality and opinion on mainstreaming women's leadership. This shows that the male elected representatives at the panchayat accept and agree on the importance of women's political empowerment and leadership. They consider

that there is a higher role for men to encourage women's political involvement. They as well identify that there should be women in politics through men's activities and promotion ideas. They as well accept that women's organizational capability is better than men's and they are capable, equal to men, to fulfill the governance. They as well agree that women's diplomacy strategies are better in the grama sabha meetings than men's as well as their ability to deal with social issues. The male leaders find that various forms of discrimination that women leaders face in the panchayat, especially in crisis management, are flooding. Others might observe that women's decision-making skills may not be successful. Some male respondents agree that women's leadership in society might have created a challenge for male leaders. However, male leaders know that female leaders have to deal with more financial problems than men, which keep them from being active in politics and let them focus on other jobs.

It can be seen that the fourth objective clearly aligns with the concept of liberal feminism. As the concept of liberal feminism advocates for the equal representation of women together with men, the Panchayati Raj Act of 1991 facilitate the equal representation of women together with men as well as change the perception of men in accepting the roles of women in the political realm and understanding the need for women leadership in the society. According to the empirical research, it signifies this aspect as the male representatives and leaders at the panchayat as well state that they value the quality and the contributions of women in the panchayat and the changing mindset and perception of the male representatives and the male dominated society towards the women's leadership. This shows how the concept of liberal feminism is clearly aligned with the novel idea of the Panchayati Raj Act of 1991, which facilitates women's political leadership at the local self-governance level.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As the study has been focused on the aspect of women's political empowerment through the leadership positions in Panchayati Raj Institutions from 2018 to 2019, the further research should focus on the aspect of woman political empowerment through leadership position in Panchayati Raj Institutions during the times of COVID and post-COVID periods. This has a great significance for the women's political empowerment through leadership positions in the Panchayati Raj Institutions during the COVID and post-COVID periods. This can significantly transform due to relocating resources and other mechanisms during the COVID and post-COVID periods.

The study already mentioned that the women's political empowerment through leadership positions at Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Idukki district have significant responsibilities and challenges due to the vulnerability of the region to various natural calamities and large and diverse population, especially the working level population. The outbreak of COVID-19 in such situations will have a far-reaching impact on the people, and in particular, the working-class population. In such cases, their responsibility as women representatives or presidents has been enhanced due to the diversity of the attention that needs to be given to the scenario in the COVID and post-COVID periods. Therefore, further research should focus on these aspects of diversified attention that women political leaders need at the local self-government in the Idukki district of Kerala.

Through such mechanisms, it will be possible to perceive how women leaders act in a diversified manner in various districts of Kerala, which are not prone to many natural calamities. Such scenarios show how the women presidents or representatives act in different scenarios and frameworks, thereby evaluating how significant is the woman empowerment aspect in different districts. Moreover, future studies should focus on making a comparative analysis between the Idukki district and other districts from another part of Kerala, showing a significant distinction between various districts regarding women's political participation and leadership.

Moreover, as the study focused on the hilly region of the Idukki district of Kerala, this comparison should focus on different geographical regions, such as the coastal areas or regions that have a more affinity towards the metropolitan areas. Thus, a comparison between these different areas will give an insight into how women representatives and their representation matters significantly in all these different geographical entities. Furthermore, in Kerala, there are prominent political parties that have a great significant impact on all the levels of administration of their state, district, and local levels. Therefore, the study should focus on a comparative analysis of different regions with different political party domination at the local self-government, thereby trying to perceive how the political ideology matters when it comes to women's political participation and empowerment through leadership at the local self-government.

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LIST OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

List of Publications

1. [S4; LT; OA] Varghese, Titty. Panchayat Jagratha Samithi role on violence against women and children in Kerala // Viešoji politika ir administravimas = Public policy and administration. Kaunas : KTU. ISSN 1648- 2603. eISSN 2029-2872. 2021, vol. 20, no. 1, p. 70-84. DOI:10.5755/j01.ppaa.20.1.28262. [Scopus; Academic Search Complete; Central & Eastern European Academic Source (CEEAS)] [CiteScore: 2,20; SNIP: 0,879; SJR: 0,409; Q1 (2019, Scopus Sources)] [Field: S 002] [Input: 1,000]

2. [S4; LT] Varghese, Titty. Women's political participation and leadership in India: examining the challenges = Moterų politinis dalyvavimas ir lyderystė Indijoje: Iššūkių nagrinėjimas // Viešoji politika ir administravimas = Public policy and administration. Kaunas: KTU. ISSN 1648-2603. eISSN 2029-2872. 2020, t. 19, Nr. 1, p. 111- 125. DOI: 10.5755/j01.ppaa.19.1.25228. [Scopus; Central & Eastern European Academic Source (CEEAS); Academic Search Complete] [CiteScore: 2,20; SNIP: 0,879; SJR: 0,409; Q1 (2019, Scopus Sources)] [FOR: S 002] [Input: 1,000]

3. [S4; LT] Varghese, Titty. The impact of women's political empowerment policy: a perspective from the Idukki district of Kerala = Moterų politinio įgalinimo politikos poveikis: Indijos Keralos valstijos Idukki rajono atvejis // Viešoji politika ir administravimas = Public policy and administration. Kaunas: KTU. ISSN 1648-2603. eISSN 2029-2872. 2019, t. 18, Nr. 3, p. 59-72. DOI: 10.5755/j01.ppaa.18.3.24710. [Scopus; Central & Eastern European Academic Source (CEEAS); Academic Search Complete] [CiteScore: 2,20; SNIP: 0,879; SJR: 0,409; Q1 (2019, Scopus Sources)] [FOR: S 002] [Input: 1,000]

4. [S1; LT] Varghese, Titty; Sarkute, Ligita. Violence against women in Germany and immigrants: a mediatized political communication? // European integration studies: research and topicalities. Kaunas: KTU. ISSN 1822- 8402. eISSN 2335-8831. 2017, no. 11, p. 31-43. DOI: 10.5755/j01.eis.0.11.18957. [Emerging Sources Citation Index (Web of Science); DOAJ; Central & Eastern European Academic Source (CEEAS)] [FOR: S 008, S 002] [Input: 0,500]

Publications indexed in the Web of Science or Scopus without Impact Factor (JCR SSCI) or SNIP, Lithuanian publishers

1. [S1; LT; OA] Varghese, Titty; Sarkute, Ligita. Violence against women in Germany and immigrants: a mediatized political communication? // European integration studies: research and topicalities. Kaunas: KTU. ISSN 1822-8402. eISSN 2335-8831. 2017, no. 11, p. 31-43. DOI: 10.5755/j01.eis.0.11.18957. [Emerging Sources Citation Index (Web of Science); DOAJ; Central & Eastern European Academic Source (CEEAS)] [Field: S 008, S 002] [Input: 0,500]

Other peer-reviewed scientific publications, foreign publishers

1. [S5; PL] Varghese, Titty. An analysis of governmental policies on violence against women in Northern European countries // Violence and society / edited by Maria Isaienkova, Olena Lytovka. Warsaw: IRF Press, 2017. ISBN 9788394363284. p. 118-127. [Field: S 005] [Input: 1,000]

Participation in conferences

1. Titty, Varghese. "Movies as Advocates of Socio-Cultural Change: What Waits for Feminism and Gender Equality in 21st century Kerala?". 15th Conference of the European Sociological Association on Sociological Knowledge for Alternative Futures, Barcelona, Spain, from 31 August to 3 September, 2021.
2. Titty, Varghese. "Fighting COVID-19 in Kerala, The Role of Local Self Government". 15th Annual Public Administration Research Conference, Center for Public and Nonprofit Management, University of Central Florida, USA on 19 March 2021.
3. Titty, Varghese. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Transgender Community in Kerala: An Analysis of Socio-Cultural Challenges". International conference on The Risk Analysis: From Perception to Prediction 6th Society for Risk Analysis Europe Nordic Chapter Conference, Faculty of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania on 5-6 November 2020.
4. Titty, Varghese., Prof. Thomas Bryer., Vishnu Muraleedharan. "Covid-19 and the Risk of Displacement of Migrant Workers; An Analysis of Media Framing in the Indian State of Kerala". International conference on The Risk Analysis: From Perception to Prediction 6th Society for Risk Analysis Europe Nordic Chapter Conference, Faculty of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania on 5-6 November 2020.
5. Titty, Varghese. "The Role of Elected Women Representatives on Combating Violence against Women, A Case of Kerala". International conference on Gender Studies and Research in 2019: Centenary Achievements and Perspectives, Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication, Gender Studies Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania on 21-23 November 2019.
6. Titty, Varghese. "The Role of New Media as a Facilitating Actor for Women's Political Empowerment: The Narrative of Samooham". International conference on (Re)Gazing: Gender and Indian Cinema in the Age of New Media, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania on 19-20 September, 2019.
7. Titty, Varghese. "The Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Political Decision Making: An Experience of Kerala". IASIA international conference on Corruption, Ethics, and Culture in Public Administrations, Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania on 24-25 April 2019.

8. Titty, Varghese. "Political Empowerment of Women in India and Lithuania: A Comparative Perspective". International Conference on Baltic Nationalism: Historical Evolution, Current Challenges and Way Forward-Centre for European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India on 26-27 November 2018.
9. Titty, Varghese. "Mediatization of Politics, Technology, and Conflict, A Case of Feminist Organization in Kerala". 10th European Feminist Research Conference on Difference, Diversity, Diffraction: Confronting Hegemonies and Dispossessions, University of Göttingen, Germany on 12-15 September 2018.
10. Titty, Varghese. "Role of Social Media on Political Communication: An Analysis of Violence Against Women in Kerala: An Anecdote from Jisha's Rape Murder". International Conference on Communication and Information Sciences in a Network Society: Experience and Insights, Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication, Vilnius, Lithuania on 14-15 June 2018.
11. Titty, Varghese. "Victimization of Women in Social Media, Risk, and Religion in Kerala". International Conference on Regional Risks and Risks to the Regions, dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence, Vilnius, Lithuania on 30-31 January 2018.
12. Titty, Varghese. " Political Communication on Violence Against Women; A Discourse Analysis from Kerala". International Conference on Media Studies organized by the Interdisciplinary Research Foundation, Warsaw, Poland on 2-3 June 2017.
13. Titty, Varghese. "Role of Social Media Communication on Violence Against Women in Kerala". International Conference on 3rd Annual Conference Contemporary Political Processes: Challenges and Opportunities, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania on 27 April 2017.
14. Titty, Varghese. " Violence Against Women by Refugee Men in Germany: A Mediatized Political Communication?". 15th International Conference on European Processes, The Future of European Union International Role: Political, Economic, and Social Challenges, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania on 07 April 2017.
15. Titty, Varghese. "An Analysis of Governmental Policies on Violence Against Women in Northern European Countries". International Conference on Violence and Society, Interdisciplinary Research Foundation, Warsaw, Poland on 18 March 2017.

Workshops, Training, and Seminars

1. Participant in the academic "Qualitative data analysis with MAXQDA: advanced level" (code TMN-S-310-216), specific focus on "Qualitative Interviewing and Data Analysis", organized by the Center for Data Analysis and Archiving (DAtA), Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania. The

duration of the event: from 27 September to 4 October, 2021; volume: 8 academic hours.

2. Participant in the academic workshop titled "Designing Measures and Organizing Risk Communication" (4 ac. hours) conducted by Prof. Audrone Telesiene for the Risk Analysis Europe Nordic Chapter Conference on 5-6 November 2020, in the Faculty of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania.

3. Participant in the academic workshop titled "Uncertainty Analysis for Predictive Assessments" conducted by Prof. Ulrika Sahlin for the Risk Analysis Europe Nordic Chapter Conference on 5–6 November 2020, in the Faculty of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology Kaunas, Lithuania.

4. Completed online training program for Jagratha Samiti, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, India, on 23 August, 2020.

5. Participant in the Design and Evaluation of Innovation Policies in Developing Countries (DEIP), a five-day course provided by UNU-MERIT (United Nations University-Maastricht Economic and Social Research and training center on Innovation and Technology, The Netherlands), on 4–8 February 2019 at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, India.

6. Participant in the 4-hour workshop at the Regional Risks and Risks to the Regions dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence on 30–31 January, 2018, topic: Collaboration in the Public Sector from a Networked Perspective.

7. Participant in a 4-hour workshop at the Regional Risks and Risks to the Regions dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence on 30–31 January 2018, topic: Analysing and Visualising Public Risk Perceptions.

8. Expert group participation in "Navigating in the national legal system of Lithuania: Enhancing foreigners' legal awareness and trust in law enforcement institutions", 27 November, 2019 Kaunas, Lithuania.

9. International Research Scholar's Seminar on India and the Baltic States: Commemorating 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi conducted by Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, JNU and Jean Monnet Chair in European Economic Integration and Energy Security on 24 January, 2019, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, and presented a paper on Dalia Grybauskaite: Success of Female Political Leadership as President of Lithuania.

10. Conference participant in the National Conference on Indian Economy and Society-Lateral Exploration, 12–14 December, 2018, Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, India.

11. Seminar participant on the topic "An Advocacy Note for the Inclusion of the Needs and Voices of Informal-Unorganized Urban Women Workers in Kerala's Local Self Governments and the Potentials of Gender Resource Centres" at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, India, on 17–18 November, 2018.

12. Seminar participant on the topic Development of Russia's far East; Reasons and Factors' conducted by the Research Group of Baltic Studies and Post-Soviet Space in the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, on 22 September, 2018.
13. Seminar participant on the topic of Ecological Compensation in Urban Development. Ekologinis kompensavimas miestų plėtroje: idėjos ir praktikos darniai raidai, 26 May, 2017. Europos informacijos biuras, Lithuanian Parliament (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas), Vilnius, Lithuania.
14. Conference participant on Women's Human Rights in Lithuania, the Achievements of Victory and Future Challenges. Experience in Implementing the Law on Protection from Violence in the Immediate Environment 2011–2016, 5 December, 2016, Lithuanian Parliament, Vilnius, Lithuania.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Annex 1. Informant's consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW

2019__y._____ month ____d. Kerala, Idukki

I, _____, agree to participate in the research of Titty Varghese, a Ph.D. student in Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, Kaunas University of Technology on the topic: *Mapping Leadership Traits and Challenges of Women's Political Empowerment at Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala State of India.*

....
....
    (Name, Surname)
    (Signature)

Annex 2. Questionnaire to the elected female representatives

This section has added the interview questions for 25 elected women representatives.

Questions

1. As a candidate, how many times have you contested in the Panchayati Raj elections, and how many times have you won the elections, and what were the positions held? In your opinion, what were the main reasons for your success in the election?

2. According to the Indian constitutional amendment act for the Panchayati Raj system, it is believed that the act envisages women's empowerment and the backward sections of the society through participation in the electoral process and governance participation. Do you believe in this concept of the Panchayati Raj system? What measures, if any, have you as a representative taken to empower and participate in women and backward sections of the society?

3. Do you believe that women's political participation and active involvement in the political process at the village level will enable women empowerment, equality, and gender development? Please explain your opinion.

4. Could you share your experience:
   - Identify various developmental issues and solutions to tackle such problems of the people in your Panchayat and area (ward level) through your active interaction and linkages.

5. As a woman representative, do you think that you are getting additional responsibilities and duties due to the gender classification? If yes, what are they?

6. Are you getting ample opportunities to represent your views and opinions on the Panchayat development board? Could you share your experience on the significant barriers if you have faced any? What are the facilitating factors, and what are the hindering factors?

7. Some people believe that even though women representatives are elected to various positions, they still depend on men to make decisions. As a woman representative, do you agree with this notion? Please explain your opinion.

8. Could you share your opinion on several of these views:
   - Women are mainly dependent on men to make decisions because they are fragile and unable to make decisions independently. Do you agree with this view? If yes, how is it visible in the Panchayat decision-making? Have you ever observed such a situation?
   - Another view is that women are less efficient than men concerning decision-making and political representation. Do you agree with this view? Do you face this kind of differentiation in the Panchayat decision-making and the participation of the developmental projects? If yes, what sort of differentiation and discrimination?

9. As an elected representative, what kind of questions are you usually raising in the Panchayat development meetings? Do you face any sort of difficulties in raising those questions, and if any member of your political party or opposition raises objections or makes blockades for those questions? If yes, what are those objections? How do you react to this? What are the measures you undertook to resolve these issues?

10. Could you share your experience on the opportunities for the elected women representatives in decision-making on various welfare and decision-making processes? Are they getting sufficient space in the discussion forum?

11. I will read you some statements. Please express your opinion on whether you agree or disagree with that statement and provide reasons why:
    - Women need to come to the forefront of the political and developmental process.
    - Women have more difficulties in holding administrative and political positions than their male counterparts.
    - If women are getting administrative and political positions, they will do much more to the development and welfare process than their male counterparts in an equitable manner.
    - Men's opinion has more weight in the Gram Sabha meetings than the elected women representatives.
    - As a woman leader, have you ever faced any form of gender discrimination in the Gram Sabha?
    - Are you a person who is keen on working in the political and developmental process in your Panchayat?

12. Could you enhance women and children development and welfare in your Panchayat under your leadership? If yes, please explain how and kindly provide examples.

13. Do you have ample representation and participation in various committees to allocate funds for the development process? If not, why?

14. Could you provide information on the Gram Sabha meetings held under your leadership? How many have attended in a year, and what are the main goals of those meetings?

15. Are you a member of any local social and religious organization, and if yes, what type of organization do you represent? If yes, do you believe that your participation and leadership in other organizations help to facilitate your decision-making and leadership in the Panchayat system?

16. Are you a part of any local political process, and if yes, to which political party do you belong? Are you satisfied with the political leadership you represent?

17. Are there any forms of training available for the newly elected women representatives in the Panchayat? What kinds of training do you think enables women to be more efficient than their male counterparts to implement the development and welfare policies and schemes and enable them to have better representation in the political process?

18. Have you organized/implemented any such training in your Panchayat to improve women's status in the Panchayat? If yes, how do you evaluate them? Were they used, and what kind of knowledge was shared?

19. Could you share your experiences and opinions on the given statements:
    - After getting elected to the highest position in the Panchayat, your status in the social life has improved.
    - You are getting much more important in the family after getting elected.

20. After getting elected to the Panchayat's highest position, your voices are getting more acceptance and recognition:
    - You can make necessary changes in the committee decisions on the developmental projects.
    - You can revise and reallocate funding for welfare projects.

21. Are there any instances in which you were compelled to act or decide in favor of or against any decisions for society's welfare, either by the influence of any political party or social compulsions? If yes, could you provide some examples?

22. As a president, could you associate with other departments and neighboring Panchayats for the welfare and well-being and better administrative convenience?

23. Could you act as a mediator or facilitator for resolving the issues and tensions between various socio-cultural groups? If yes, what are the instances and the level of success of such mediation?

24. How many programs and projects have been taken and implemented this year for the welfare and development of the Scheduled Cast and Scheduled Tribes women and children in this Panchayat? What are the roles you played in facilitating the schemes?

25. India has been placed in the 78th position in the World Ranking regarding the corruption index, according to the Transparency International Report 2018. Do you think that corruption and corrupt practices are prevalent in this Panchayat as well? If yes, as a leader, what are the measures you employ for eradicating these corrupt practices?

26. Could you share your views on this statement, and please explain why you think so:
    - There are lesser corruption and corrupt practices in the Panchayats headed by women representatives.

27. Thinking about the number of women in politics, do you think that the number is too low or sufficient, if more women joined the political process and decision-making, would be possible to decrease corruption in the society?

28. Have you ever faced any incidences where you were required to react emotionally, like anger, crying, or sympathy, during the committee meetings? If yes, in what situations where you forced to behave like that?

29. Whether political affiliation with anyone from your family helps you with the administrative and decision-making process?

30. In general, do you think political tradition and previous administrative process experience facilitate the efficiency and help in the administrative process?

31. Could you share your experiences and opinions on the given statements:
    - There are committees, programs, and policies for the welfare and development of women in the panchayat and prevention of domestic violence.
    - To prevent domestic violence, the Jagratha committees (vigilant committees) have a significant role.
    - Jagratha committees are sufficient to combat the issues of violence towards women in this Panchayat. If not, please cite the reasons for that, and how could your leadership make it efficient?
    - As a woman representative of the Panchayat, where were you able to prevent dowry related issues and child marriage
    - Your Panchayat had received various assistance from the Government of Kerala (women's commission, police, legal authority) in preventing violence against women.
    - The issue of violence and discrimination towards women is deep-rooted in the society and will not change much in the socio-cultural setting? What is your opinion?
    - There is a necessity to provide training for men to increase the culture of equality and give respect to women.

32. As a woman representative, could you work and cooperate with the local self-government, district, and state administration to get the panchayat's needs and did you face any issues or administrative hassles? Moreover, were you forced to please and appease the higher authority for getting the needs done?

33. As a woman representative, what will be the measures you took or will undertake in the future to coordinate the activities of women empowerment and Jagratha committees and implement the Gender resource center in your panchayat, as some of the Panchayats have already implemented the Gender resource center?

34. As a woman representative, could you share your opinions on the given statements:
    - During the natural calamity in 2018, as a Panchayat President/Vice president, you have acted quickly on various decisions, e.g. setting up relief centers.
    - You have not faced challenges from the higher authority on various decisions.
    - You have got support from the other members.
    - Your Panchayat got financial assistance from the district.
    - You have received support from other male members of the committee.
    - You were given sufficient support from your family.

35. Could you share your opinion on the Women's Wall Movement that happened on 1 January, 2019 in our state for ensuring safety and equality for women?
36. What are the measures carried out to enhance the cultural emancipation of women and women empowerment through the panchayat policies and programs of the panchayat?
37. As a full-time representative, engaging with various developmental policies and programs, what kind of support did you receive?
38. When engaging with various developmental policies and programs, what kind of support were you receiving from the family, and do they support your political decisions and opinions?
39. To what extent were you able to work and deliver the services without corruption and corrupt practices in your panchayat?
40. As a woman representative and the president/vice president, what are the roles you played for the women's emancipation and enabling them to come to the political front and play the role of women representatives? If yes, what are these measures?
41. Would you like to contest for the next election and be selected for the administrative position to serve in the Panchayat? If yes, what are the motivating factors? If not, what are the reasons?
16.

Annex 3. Questionnaire to the elected male representatives

This section has added the interview questions for 15 elected male representatives to identify men's perception of women's political leadership.

Questions

1. Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally. How do you evaluate India and Kerala's situation?
2. Do you think that the strategy towards gender equality is sufficient in Kerala? Your opinion about the PRI policy, especially at our LSG level?
3. How do you think, as a man, could you involve yourself in integrating women in the political sector?
4. What is your opinion on the role of elected women representatives in preparing, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating your panchayat policies?
5. Do you think that women representatives can regulate and spend financial assistance at various programs in your panchayat properly? Especially when various new projects are coming to your panchayat, and our government would like to provide development funds. In this case, do you think your present woman president will be able to manage the funds and allocate it sufficiently to all wards, of course, with your support?
6. Are there any special discussions or awareness programs organized at your panchayat, under the men's club or leadership, for encouraging more women's participation in politics? Since, I have heard and seen that there are various incidences of violence against women and girls going on. Therefore, do you think it is time to organize social cohesion and safety classes for the younger generation at your panchayat? For these activities, how are women leaders coordinating?
7. Have you already conducted any such public programs in educational institutions?
8. Do you ever notice that women leaders face any discrimination at the LSG activities? Some women leaders do not have any previous leadership experience or may not have good experience in politics. In this case, do you think these women can fulfill their duties properly, or do you think they need at least some years of previous political experience?
9. Did you ever notice that women representatives do not fulfill their tasks properly? Especially if they are newcomers in politics or just had a few years of working experience in Kudumbashree?
10. Are there any circumstances where women representatives sought your support and guidance to tackle challenges or handed over their responsibilities because they could not do it? Still, in this society, some people are not very happy with the idea of the reservation system at the panchayat level and do not appreciate that women can as well be very strong leaders at the panchayat and fulfill the tasks as any male leader. How do you evaluate this scenario?

11. Have you ever interfered in promoting other women leaders to have access to power at the party level or recommended them to the party? If not, what could be the main reason?

12. I have seen that in many panchayats, women and girls tend to go to female ward members to report any crimes, but going to a male member, women are hesitant. Thus, do you think that women representatives are more capable of dealing with women and girls' protection at your panchayat than men?

13. Do you think that women who are active in Kudumbashree or other religious or other organizations have more popularity than men? There are few women leaders across Kerala, who got elected to panchayat level leadership without any political affiliation or previous leadership experience. In this case, how do you evaluate the importance of political affiliation for women to be a leader?

14. Do you think family's support, especially the husband's support, is compulsory for a woman to be in LSG? As there are many women members that I have met who clearly said that without their husband or husband's family support, they may not be able to travel with the male members or leaders, especially in this district with natural calamities, and at that time, even if it is midnight, women were required to come out for the safety of their people. In such scenarios, what have you noticed? Have you ever encountered any challenges or seen if women leaders could not travel during night?

15. Do you think that women leaders face more cultural obstacles than men to be political leaders? I have noticed that women who were candidates in the election but did not win experienced cases of verbal/cyberbullying against women. Thus, have you ever noticed such cases in this panchayat?