

**POVERTY AND YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT:
LINKAGES IN KERALA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores one of the key issues in current research on gender and development: the links between poverty and young women's employment. Specifically, the following questions were addressed, in the context of Kerala: Which young women work for pay and why? To what extent is a woman's household economic status -- especially poverty status -- an important determinant of employment, and to what degree does this relationship differ for married and single women? Data for this study come from a 1997 survey of 530 women aged 18 to 35 in Trivandrum district of Kerala. The analysis provides strong evidence for a U-shaped relationship between household economic status (or class status) and women's current employment status. This is true for the entire sample and for the married women. However, in case of single women, poverty increases the likelihood of paid employment without significant effect at the upper end of the class spectrum. The interplay of economic factors (in terms of household needs and aspirations) and cultural factors (in terms of women's position in the family as unmarried daughters as opposed to wives or daughters-in-law) as determinants of women's employment is important both on the supply side of the labour market and women's ability to obtain employment in an imperfect and almost saturated labour market in the context of Kerala.

JEL Classification: I32, J12, J16, J23

Key Words: women, employment, poverty, households, Kerala

Introduction

The evidence is overwhelming that the labour force participation of women, especially paid employment, raises the quality of life not only at the level of household but also for society at large (Acharya and Bennett, 1983; Bruce and Dwyer, 1988; Desai and Jain, 1994; Dreze and Sen, 1989; Folbre et al., 1991; Kishore, 1996; Sen, 1990).¹ However, what also emerges from the labour force research on women in developing countries is that in order to understand the underlying nuances of women's employment behaviour, one must take into account gender and familial relations, household circumstances, family resources, and cultural expectations, in addition to the standard labour supply hypotheses from an individual's perspective.² Although empirical work on this issue is limited, this is especially the case in Asian countries including India (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Desai and Jain, 1994; Dreze and Sen, 1995; Greenhalgh, 1988; Hull, 1979; King and Evenson, 1983; Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997; Wolf, 1991).

Recent debates have emphasised the importance of gender inequalities and social class as they relate to women's employment: arguments have been put forth positing a negative (Buvinic and Lycette, 1988; Greenhalgh, 1991; Sathar and Desai, 1994; Sharma, 1980), positive

(Choi and Brinton, 1993; King and Hill, 1993; Subbarao and Raney, 1993) or a curvilinear (Hull, 1979; Malhotra and DeGraff, 1997) relationship between women's employment and socioeconomic class. Therefore, whether poor women are more or less likely to be employed than better-off women is an empirical question. The literature on women's labour force participation in developing countries has focussed largely on married women (Doan and Popkin, 1989; Michaelopoulos et. al., 1992; Opong, 1983; Wong and Levine, 1992), ignoring the role and contribution of single women. A few research studies show that the economic role of single women can also be critical in shaping household strategies of survival and upward mobility (Greenhalgh, 1988; Salaff, 1981; Wolf, 1991). However, how this role may differ for daughters as opposed to wives or daughters-in-law in the context of poverty is also an empirical question.

Given the intricacies and contradictions noted above, we contribute to a better understanding of women's employment behaviour in Kerala through a household-level analysis of young, single and married women. Specifically, we ask the following questions in this paper:

- (i) Which young women work for pay and why?
- (ii) To what extent is a woman's household economic status a determinant of employment?
- (iii) To what degree does the relationship between household economic status and woman's employment differ for married and single women?

The state of Kerala in India provides an interesting and distinctive setting for investigating the issues of poverty, marital status and economic roles of women. On the one hand, normative traditions of relative freedom and access to opportunities such as education of women,

as well as value of daughters in the parental home, would indicate that women who are single would have strong social support for engaging themselves in productive roles. On the other hand, poor economic opportunities and a discriminatory labour market structure contradict this idea and present a case for additional barriers to the labour force participation of women, particularly married women.

II. The Setting: Kerala

The present study attempts to explore the interlinkages between marital status, economic conditions and the employment of the women in the Indian state of Kerala in a macro context. Kerala is located at the south-western tip of the Indian peninsula. Historically, the position of women in Kerala has been relatively favourable, especially by South Asian standards (Agarwal, 1994a, 1994b). This is partly due to the practice of matrilineal systems which allow for some degree of inheritance rights among women and provide considerable natal family support for the daughters before and after marriage. Equally important have been women's historical access to education and relatively late entry into marriage. Even in 1971, more than half of all women (54 per cent) were literate and the singulate mean age at marriage for women was 21 years during 1961-71. Currently, women are almost at parity with men regarding education - 86.2 per cent literate in 1991 compared to 93.6 per cent for men and with comparable enrollment rates in secondary schools. Moreover, while marriage continues to be almost universal, the average age at which women marry is more than 22, a late pattern relative to developing societies.

Kerala is noted for a remarkably high level of social development within South Asian nations. This is the case with not just health and education, but also in terms of demographic change (Bhat and Irudaya Rajan, 1990; Krishnan, 1984, 1985; Nag, 1985; Panikar, 1985; Panikar

and Soman, 1984; Shivakumar, 1991; United Nations, 1975; Vijayanunni, 1995; Zacharia et al., 1994). The total fertility rate has declined from 4 in 1971 to 1.8 in 1991 and the infant mortality rate in 1991 is comparable or superior to other demographically advanced countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand or Korea. Moreover, the life expectancy of both males and females in Kerala is the highest in the country (67 years for males and 72 for females during 1986-90).

Even as Kerala ranks high on indicators of social welfare, however, it has not experienced similar levels of progress economically. The per capita income is one of the lowest in the country and it decreased from Rs. 1463 in 1980-81 to Rs. 1447 in 1988-89 at 1980-81 prices. However, in recent years there is an indication of reduction in disparity in income distribution as shown by sharp reduction of poverty. The proportion of population below poverty line declined from 48 per cent in 1977-78 to 17 per cent in 1987-88 for the state (CMIE, 1992).

The labour force participation in Kerala is one of the lowest (31 per cent) in the country. If we take into consideration all workers (main and marginal), the female work participation rate in Kerala declined from 16.61 per cent in 1981 to 15.85 per cent in 1991. On the contrary, the male work participation rate increased from 44.89 per cent to 47.58 per cent during the period 1981-91. The growth rate of employment is also extremely slow. In fact, an important dimension of Kerala's economic crisis is the acute and ever-rising level of unemployment (Vaidyanathan, 1994a).³ For instance, while Kerala accounts for only 4 per cent of India's population, its share of India's unemployed is as high as 16 per cent. Work seekers registered in the employment exchanges increased from 0.7 million in 1975 to nearly 3 million in 1990; the latter represents close to 30 per cent of the work force. There may be some over-estimation in this source since some of those who are registered may be engaged in

some gainful employment (Mukherjee and Isaac, 1991). According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) data, the number of educated unemployed in Kerala rose from 3.51 lakhs in 1983 to 6.34 lakhs in 1987-88.

Unlike other states in India, household and non-household industry absorb a large proportion of female workers in Kerala. This is largely attributed to the existence of two household industries (HHIs): coir and cashew. However, studies have pointed to the deterioration of female employment in this sector (Simon, 1994). Stiff competition has compelled the introduction of capital-intensive technologies, causing risk to the absorption of women workers (Kannan, 1983). Hence in 1991, HHIs drew only approximately 6 per cent of the female work force while the corresponding figure was 17.8 per cent in 1961 (Gulati, Irudaya Rajan and Ramalingam, 1997).

Economic conditions have been particularly detrimental to opportunities for female employment in Kerala (Eapen, 1992). Despite positive indicators on inequality with regard to kinship, marriage and education, indicators on women's economic role show a less favourable picture. Rates of female employment have been low in general and much more lower than male employment in particular throughout the decades of 1960's-1980's. This has been the case despite strong interest in labour force activity among women. The results of the 38th round (1983) of NSS showed that the incidence of unemployment as per the usual status criterion was around 11 and 17 per cent for men and women respectively in rural Kerala, against two and one per cent for India as a whole. The current daily status incidence of unemployment for the above categories was 24 and 31 per cent in Kerala which was 2.5 to 3.5 times the rates for all-India (Kannan, 1995a, 1995b). Moreover, even as the educated unemployment in Kerala has increased substantially, the extent of

increase of unemployment among female work seekers has been relatively much higher (Mathew, 1995).

Looking at the political economy of labour and development in Kerala, Kannan (1998) argues that there is a mismatch between labour-supply and labour-demand as a result of changing job expectations of the younger generations in a technologically stagnant economy. Moreover, the rural labour market in Kerala exhibits a paradox of high unemployment and high wages (Nair, 1997).

Significant gender-based wage differentials characterise labour market in every country in the world : women earn, on average, 60-70 per cent as much as men (World Bank, 1995). Gender discrimination in the labour market is also a factor contributing to low levels of economic participation among women in Kerala. Occupational sex-segregation is severe, with only a handful of occupations such as teaching, semi-skilled and unskilled production work (often textiles) open to women. Biases in employment often originate with the educational system in which women are typically limited to the generalised liberal arts education; they are seriously under-represented in vocational and professional training. This results in qualifications and aspirations among women suitable for a narrow range of jobs with severe competition. Moreover, there has been a tendency for feminisation of poverty and the number of female-headed households have been increasing sharply. All this suggests severe economic marginalisation of women in Kerala's development process. Recently, there has been a growing discomfort with the concept of "Kerala model" as a result of various opposing trends, some of which have been discussed above (Isaac and Tharakan, 1995; Raj, 1994; Saradmoni, 1994).⁴

III. Data and Variables

Data for this study come from a 1997 survey of young women in Trivandrum district of Kerala. The sample comprised 500 households including 652 women between the ages of 18 and 35. However, analysis in this paper is based on 630 single and currently married women. The remaining 22 women are excluded from the analysis as they are widowed, divorced or separated. Data were collected for a set of important variables such as the process of job search, disposition of wages, complete work histories beginning at age 15, household structure and composition, as well as specifics regarding occupation, hours of work and wage levels.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for the analysis of current employment is a dichotomous variable that takes the value 1 if a woman is currently employed for cash and 0 otherwise.

Independent Variables

Class Status

The socioeconomic status of the household is measured on the basis of household expenditure. Since welfare levels of households are raised by the goods and services they consume, not by income available for consumption, and income data are more prone to errors than consumption data, consumption is used as the measure of welfare rather than income in this study. Moreover, in modeling employment, household income is likely to be an endogenous rather than exogenous factor. Furthermore, household expenditure in this sample is closely linked to modern consumer goods owned by the household.

In fact, the consumption-based measures of welfare are commonly used by the researchers in making poverty assessments (Demery, 1993). The consumption measure used in this study is comprehensive which

includes food consumption (32 items), daily expenditure (23 items), and other consumption expenditures. The use value of durable goods cannot be included in the aggregation of consumption expenditures because of non-availability of data. The values for all food and non-food items were annualised by referring to different recall periods for different items and the aggregation of total expenditures was reached. Finally, the households' total consumption is divided by the number of household members to obtain per capita consumption, which is used as the main indicator of welfare or class status of the household in this paper.

The study examines women's employment at three levels of economic status : low class, that is, with a per capita consumption expenditure under Rs. 6000 per year; middle class, that is, with a per capita consumption expenditure ranging from Rs. 6000 to Rs. 10000 per year; and high class, that is, with a per capita consumption expenditure exceeding Rs. 10000.

Respondents' Characteristics

The individual characteristics of the woman are measured by way of three variables : marital status (a dichotomous variable that takes the value 1 if a woman is currently married and 0 if she is single), age (a continuous variable) and education (a dichotomous variable that takes the value 1 for 10+ years of education and 0 otherwise). Since education in Kerala is widespread and a considerable proportion of women have secondary schooling, we preferred such a dichotomous measure for education instead of number of years of education.

As regards the hypothesised relationship, age of the woman is likely to be positively related to her employment; we would expect a positive relationship between women's education and employment, since higher education increases human capital and may be critical to modern sector

jobs. However, given that Kerala has an abundant well-educated labour force and there is no corresponding rise in modern sector employment, this relationship may not be strong.

Family and Societal Characteristics

The family and societal characteristics include four dummy measures : urban residence (a rough indicator of labour market conditions), religion (set to equal 1 if the woman is a Muslim and 0 if she is either a Hindu or a Christian), caste (set to equal 1 if the woman belongs to higher/forward caste and 0 otherwise) and for married women only, the husband's occupational status (set to equal 1 if the husband is skilled or professional and 0 otherwise).

The urban residence is likely to be positively associated with women's employment because of the greater concentration of modern sector and industrial jobs in urban areas. Since Muslims are generally seen as more 'conservative' in their treatment of daughters in terms of early marriages, less education, and considerably less freedom of movement compared to Hindu or Christian, we would expect a lower employment level among Muslim women. As for caste, women from backward social/caste groups in India, in general, are more likely to work for wage employment, possibly because of sheer survival, as compared to women from higher castes.

We would expect different relationship between married women's employment and their husband's occupational status. On the one hand, since skilled/professional husbands are better connected to official and systematic channels of job acquisition, their wives will be in a better position to obtain jobs. The same relationship holds true if norms in Kerala do not encourage a life of leisure for prosperous wives. On the other hand, if Kerala demonstrates patterns similar to Indonesia and

Taiwan, the wives of men who hold a relatively high status job may not work as a sign of their status. In fact, research evidence in North India suggests such a relationship (Panda, 1994).

Household Composition

Since we have collected detailed information on household structure in terms of its composition by gender and generation, we are in a position to analyse a set of six indicators.

1. Number of same generation women (mostly sisters and sisters-in-law). We expect this variable to have a negative effect on women's employment because women of the same generation may serve as substitute labour market workers as a part of the strategy on the division of labour. However, for married women, the same generation women may free mothers for employment by providing easily accessible child care.
2. Number of same generation men (mostly brothers, brothers-in-law and for married women, husbands). We expect this variable to have a negative effect on women's employment due to the fact that men of their generation are likely to be working.
3. Presence of mother or mother-in-law. Since mother or mother-in-law in general may provide substitute child care, this variable is likely to be positively associated with women's employment who are married.
4. Presence of father or father-in-law. Since father or father-in-law are likely to be major earners in the household, we would expect this variable to have a negative effect on women's employment, perhaps more so for single women.

5. Number of other older relatives. We expect this variable to have a negative effect on women's employment, mainly for married women, if they are additional economic burden in the household. However, older relatives may serve as substitute care-takers of children facilitating the employment of young women. Since both the number and proportion of elderly (60 years and more) are rising rapidly in Kerala, married women's care-giver role may increase further.
6. Presence of children (for married women only). We would expect this variable to have a negative effect on women's employment because of the conflict between the maternal role and non-domestic work. In fact, this variable is likely to be important for married women since the literature suggests that presence of young children has a negative effect on household welfare even after controlling for pertinent socio-economic variables (Panda, 1997a).

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means of the independent variables and current employment status separately for single and married women and for the entire sample. It shows that single women have a considerably higher rate of employment as compared to married women: 42 per cent as opposed to 27 per cent. As is evident from our sample, the overall rate of employment for the women is higher than the general rate in Kerala. This may be partly because of our efforts in carefully probing the nature of women's work in the survey. However, compared to the overall high levels of education, the women's employment even in our sample seems to be low. More than half of the women in our sample have schooling beyond 10th grade. As one would expect, a higher proportion of single women have 10 or more years of schooling as compared to married women : 63 per cent as opposed to 47 per cent.

Table 1. Means of Independent and Dependent Variables used in Modelling Female Employment in Trivandrum, 1997 (Total and by Marital Status)

VARIABLE	ALL WOMEN	SINGLE WOMEN	MARRIED WOMEN
Currently Employed	.27	.42	.20
<u>Respondent's Characteristics</u>			
Married	.70	--	--
Age	26.64(5.17)	21.94(2.94)	28.66(4.57)
Education 10+ Years	.52	.63	.47
<u>Family, Societal Characteristics</u>			
Urban Residence	.42	.49	.40
Religion			
Hindu/Christian	.84	.91	.81
Muslim	.16	.08	.19
Caste			
Lower/backward	.67	.65	.68
Higher/forward	.33	.35	.32
Husband			
Skilled/Professional	--	--	.49
<u>Household composition</u>			
Number Same Generation Women	.45(.67)	.71(.73)	.34(.61)
Number Same Generation Men	1.20(.82)	.95(.90)	1.30(.76)
Mother or Mother-in-law	.65	.96	.52
Father or Father-in-law	.52	.84	.38
Number Other Older Relatives	.40(.66)	.39(.61)	.41(.69)
No. of Children (0-4)	--	--	.52(.65)
<u>Class Status</u>			
Low	.28	.31	.27
Middle	.36	.31	.38
High	.36	.38	.35
N	630	189	441

Note : Standard Deviations for non-dichotomous variables are presented in parentheses.

A much higher proportion of married as compared to single women are from Muslim background (19 per cent and 8 per cent respectively) indicating religion differentials in marriage. More than half of the married women have a parent, in-law or a relative from older generation residing with them. As regards class status, there is a remarkable overall similarity in the distribution of class status by marital status. Nearly 30 per cent of the women reside in poor households as compared to slightly more than one-third of the women in rich households.

Table 2 presents differences in women's employment by class and marital status. For the entire sample, we notice a U-shaped pattern of the relationship between women's current employment status and class status. In other words, at both ends of the class spectrum, more proportion of women are in the paid labour force (29 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). In the middle class, less proportion of women are employed for money (only 16 per cent). We argue that higher level of employment at the lower end of the class status may be need-based, while higher level of employment at the upper end of the class status may be resource-based (the ability to acquire a job through greater access to resources). The curvilinear relationship between socioeconomic status and women's employment is also applicable to single as well as married women. However, the U-shaped pattern is clearly evident among the single women with a higher proportion of women employed at the 'low' class spectrum (55 per cent) compared to the 'high' class spectrum (41 per cent). On the contrary, although less sharp as in the case of single women, the U-shaped pattern also holds true for the married women with the difference that a substantially higher proportion of married women are employed at the 'high' class spectrum (34 per cent) compared to the 'low' class spectrum (17 per cent).

What factors distinguish currently employed women from those not currently employed? Are the determinants of women's employment

Table 2. Distribution of Employment by Class and Marital Status

Marital Status	Class Status		
	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
<u>Percent Employed</u>			
Single	55.2	30.0	40.8
Married	16.7	10.8	33.5
Total	29.2	15.9	35.8

different between single and married women? In order to answer these questions, we turn to a multivariate analysis. Given the binary form of the current employment variable, we use logistic regression to model the log-odds of the likelihood of being employed as a function of four sets of independent variables discussed earlier: respondent's characteristics, familial/societal characteristics, household composition and class status. Since one of the main ideas underlying this study is to examine whether the determinants vary by marital status, we estimated three models with all the factors common to both married and single women : one jointly with a dummy for marital status and two separately for each group of women. We also estimated a fourth model for married women only in which we included two more variables, i.e., husband's profession and number of children aged 0-4.

The results for all the four logit models are presented in Table 3. Logit coefficients present the log-odds of the likelihood of occurrence for the category of interest in the dependent variable (probability of currently employed). The results presented in columns 2 and 3 of Table 3 indicate that there are important differences by marital status in the

Table 3. Logit Coefficients for the Effect of Personal, Household and Economic Characteristics on the Current Employment Status of Young Women, Trivandrum, 1997 (Total and by Marital Status)

VARIABLE	ALL WOMEN	SINGLE WOMEN	MARRIED MODEL 1	MARRIED MODEL 2
<u>Respondent's Characteristics</u>				
Married	-1.362***	--	--	--
Age	.096***	.178***	.095**	.070**
Education 10+ Years	.294	-.528	.680**	.738**
<u>Family, Societal Characteristics</u>				
Urban Residence	.662***	.987**	.584*	.506
Religion				
Hindu/Christian	--	--	--	--
Muslim	-1.759**	-2.276**	-1.545**	-1.559***
Caste				
Lower/backward	--	--	--	--
Higher/forward	.031	.276	-.108	-.178
Husband Skilled/Professional	--	--	--	.601*
<u>Household composition</u>				
No. Same Generation Women	.045	-.419	.332	.271
No. Same Generation Men	-.267*	-.595***	-.333	-.344
Mother or Mother-in-law	.327	1.627	.019	.059
Father or Father-in-law	-.213	-1.732***	.467	.520
No. Other Older Relatives	-.373**	-.217	-.602**	-.631***
No. of Children(0-4)	--	--	--	-.628***
<u>Class Status</u>				
Low	1.134***	1.603***	.819**	.945**
Middle	--	--	--	--
High	.546*	-.068	.738**	.693*
Model Chi Sq (Degrees of freedom)	109.4*** (13)	48.5*** (12)	64.8*** (12)	71.8 (14)
N	630	189	441	441

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

effects on women's employment among the four groups of explanatory variables. For the entire sample of women (joint model in column 1) several factors distinguish women who are currently working from women not currently working.

After considering the simultaneous effects of the three groups of explanatory variables, the class effects show the same pattern as was evident in the bivariate table for the entire sample. But there are important differences across marital status. For instance, poverty increases the likelihood of paid work among single as well as married women. However, the U-shaped relationship between class status and women's employment holds true only for married women, even after including the controls. In other words, it suggests that among the poor households, both daughters and wives/daughters-in-law contribute towards household strategies for survival by getting jobs. On the contrary, among the well-off households, unmarried daughters do not seem to be part of the strategy for social and economic mobility; however, such a role is apparent for married women.

Table 4, which shows the extent to which employed women share their wages within the family further supports our arguments of household strategies of survival or upward mobility. For married employed women, the proportion of women who share wages with the family is much higher at both ends of the class spectrum again suggesting a U-shaped pattern. However, the relationship is negative for single women : the proportion of single employed women who share wages with the family declines monotonically from 72 per cent in poor households to 28 per cent in better-off households. This provides additional support for the argument that household strategies of survival as well as mobility are a major basis for women's employment.

Table 4. Disposition of Wages : Employed Women by Class and Marital Status

Marital Status	Class Status		
	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
<u>Percent who share wages</u>			
Single	71.9	61.1	27.6
Married	65.0	51.7	59.6

Another explanation for high levels of employment among married women from well-off households is their better access to effective means of securing employment through utilisation of systematic channels, contacts and resources. Table 5 gives the main source of inquiry for obtaining current job by class status, separately for employed married

Table 5. Main Source of Inquiry for Current Job: Employed Women by Class and Marital Status

Marital Status	Class Status		
	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
<u>Main source of inquiry for current job</u>			
SINGLE			
Friends/relatives	72.4	50.0	46.5
Self-initiated	22.4	35.0	25.4
Government scheme	5.2	15.0	28.2
MARRIED			
Friends/relatives	82.5	30.7	25.8
Self-initiated	10.0	23.5	32.9
Government scheme	7.5	45.8	41.3

and single women. The possible sources are categorised into three groups : friends/relatives, self-initiated search (direct contact with employer, newspaper or other advertisement), and government schemes. The table reveals that the main source of job inquiry for poor women is friends/relatives. On the contrary, better-off women get their jobs either through self-initiated inquiry or through government schemes. This clearly shows that poor women are barred from access to these schemes and well-off women have access to and understanding of official systems to obtain their jobs.

The effects of higher education show differences across marital status. Table 3 shows that better-educated married women are more likely to work, while this variable is irrelevant to the employment of single women.

As regards the effects of family and societal factors, urban residence is positively related with women's employment regardless of marital status. Since more modern jobs are available in the urban areas, married and unmarried women alike have access to such jobs. The effect of coming from a Muslim background is negative on women's employment regardless of marital status. It shows the conservative attitude towards women's work among Muslim families. The caste status has no significant effect on women's employment.

The number of same generation men and presence of father or father-in-law show a strong negative effect on single women's employment. However, these variables are irrelevant to the employment of married women. Since young men and father in the household are likely to be major earners in the family, these variables have a negative effect on employment of unmarried daughters. The presence of one or more other older relatives in the household has a strong negative effect

on married women's employment. The elders residing with a couple prevent married women's participation in paid employment. This aspect needs further probing.

The last logistic model (Model 2 for married women) shows that the inclusion of husband's profession and the presence of children does not alter the above comparison in any significant manner. As expected, married women with young children in the household are less likely to be employed than women without children. The effect of husband's profession (skilled/professional occupation) on women's employment is strong and positive. There may be two reasons why wives of skilled or professional men are more likely to be employed : the more positive attitude of professional men towards women's employment and benefit from the advantageous contact and resources attached to well-placed husbands.

V. Conclusion

The multivariate results clearly suggest that when the entire sample is taken together, household socioeconomic or class status show a U-shaped relationship with women's current employment status, even after controlling for variables relating to respondent's characteristics, family/societal characteristics and household composition. The analysis provides strong confirmation for the importance of marital status when considering young women's employment in Kerala. The U-shaped relationship between women's employment and class status holds true for married women. However, in case of single women, poverty increases the likelihood of paid work without significant effect at the upper end of the class spectrum. In other words, unmarried daughters do not seem to be part of the strategy of social and economic mobility among well-off households. The analysis of disposition of wages (who share wages with the family) and main source of inquiry for current job by the married

employed women provide additional support for the argument that household strategies for survival as well as mobility are major basis for women's employment.

The interplay of economic factors (in terms of household needs and aspirations) and cultural factors (in terms of women's position in the family as unmarried daughters as opposed to wives or daughters-in-law) as determinants of women's employment is important both on the supply side of the labour market and women's ability to obtain employment in an imperfect and almost saturated labour market in the context of Kerala.

Notes:

1. Although empirical research suggests considerable diversity, levels and patterns of female labour force participation can have profound significance for economic productivity, human resource utilisation, household welfare, fertility behaviour and women's empowerment. It is important to note that an assessment of whether employment empowers women or acts to reinforce their subordination is difficult, without reference to broader structures of gender inequality and whether women are independent to control the income they derive from work (Blumberg, 1989, 1991a, 1995; Faulkner and Lawson, 1991; Kapadia, 1997; Moghadam, 1994, 1995; Safa, 1990, 1993).
2. For a discussion of economic and sociological theories, and the complexity inherent in the patterns and determinants of female labour force participation in developing countries, see Beneria and Feldmen, 1992; Blau and Robins, 1990; Blumberg, 1991b; Bruce and Dwyer, 1988; Buvinic and Lycette, 1988; Holzer, 1987; Leslie and Paulosso, 1989; Mencher, 1989; Oppong, 1983; Rexroat, 1990; Sandell, 1980; Tinker, 1990.
3. According to A. Vaidyanathan the serious problem in India is that of growing educated unemployment, not so much in quantitative terms but in terms of its political importance (Vaidyanathan, 1994b). It is important to note that the unemployment problem is not unique to India alone. For the first time since the great depression of the 1930s, industrialised nations and developing nations alike are facing the problem of long-term persistent unemployment. This can be attributed to two trends. First, jobs have been rendered obsolete by rapid technological change, such as that which has taken place in automobile and

manufacturing plants, where robots and machines replace people. Second, the rapid movement of manufacturing capacity, capital and people in the global economy means that workers everywhere now face unprecedented competition and insecurity (Panda, 1995). What is most alarming about the employment crisis worldwide is that its nature is structural, not seasonal. For a discussion on the role of manpower policy to overcome different kinds of unemployment, especially the structural type, see Panda(1997b).

4. Kerala's exceptional achievements in social development and quality of life in spite of a relatively low level of economic development are well known and well documented. For a discussion on "Kerala model of development", see Franke and Chasin, 1994; Morris and McAlpin, 1982; Ramachandran, 1997; Ratcliffe, 1978; Sen, 1992. For a discussion on the limitations of the Kerala model, see George, 1993; Oommen, 1993; Prakash, 1994; Subrahmanian, 1990 . The ongoing People's Campaign to empower panchayats and municipal bodies may have far-reaching implications (Isaac and Harilal, 1997). According to Franke and Chasin (1997), Kerala's decentralisation programme is probably the largest of its kind in the world at present. For a most recent discussion on the Kerala model of development, see Tharamangalam (1998), and subsequent responses to his article by other scholars in Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (Franke and Chasin, 1998; Heller, 1998; Omvedt, 1998; Parayil, 1998; Parel, 1998).

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