

# Political Empowerment among Muslim Women Representatives in Kerala

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## Abstract

The 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitutions in 1992 and 1993 respectively provided for 33 percentage of reservation for women both in the Panchayath and urban local bodies. This amendment has opened a new chapter in the history of women's fight for rights and empowerment. Women political reservation could change a political situation very drastically from the grassroots level. On March 9, 2010, the Rajya Sabha passed the Women Reservation Bill increasing women's representation in the Local Self Government bodies (LSG). It was an outcome of fourteen years of women's struggles. Bihar was the first State to implement women reservation in Panchayath Raj level of 2005, Kerala was the sixth state to implement such a law and also Kerala declared 50% reservation in Panchayath Raj Institution on 2010 for empowering women to be the part of our politics and also been empowered all walks of their life. The present study tries to analyse political empowerment in Muslim women in Kerala after enter into the LSG in Kerala.

In the past the Muslim women found themselves in a very a pathetic condition. Muslim women were despised many walks of their life due to the entrenched customs and beliefs that led them to marginalized life compared to other women in the society. The enhancement of women reservation to fifty percent led to fifty percent women elected to the Panchayath-Municipalities, corporation, Block and District Panchayath. The present study attempts to investigate the changes brought about in the status and position of Muslim women as a member in Local Self Government after getting the reservation and also how this transformation has affected them, their whole political field. It observed that they have acquired real empowerment of their entire life and in political decision-making. In this situation, the study is more feasible and significant.

**Keywords:** Muslim Women; 50% Political Reservation; Empowerment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Seventy third and Seventy fourth constitution amendment opened a new era of women political participation in the local self Govt bodies in India. Fifty percent reservation has recorded as a historical moment implemented by Rajya Sabha at 2010, after executing the reservation policy, number

of women entry in politics has increased. Muslim women's entry can be seen much augmented. After Indonesia, India has the second largest Muslim population in the World. At 13.4 percent of the over one billion population, Muslims are the largest minority in India.

The Muslims in Kerala is estimated at around one fourth of the state's population. They are the most educated Muslim community in the country (census, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Muslim women are working in the administrative sectors in the state. Previous election result revealed an enhancement in Muslim political participation every five year. This shows the changing status of Muslim women in the society. Political entry helps them to achieve leadership. Entrenched traditional views, lack of political support, lack of confidence and lack of financial support are the barriers of women's decision making. Political participation is the significant way by which those barriers can be overcome.

Indian women are still under the clutches of feudal and patriarchal setup makes them lack of political participation. Indian women has acquired voting rights along with men and also has the right to contest in the election starting from local bodies to parliament elections. This has lead women to participate in the first general elections starting from 1952 onwards which is said to be the positive signs of women empowerment and equality. When looking into community wise participation, Muslim women in politics are very low compared to the national average of 11 percent in the parliament. Among the women folk in India, Muslim women are neglected to participate in political activities or contest in the elections, due to Islamic traditions and culture. It not only affects the political participation but even their rights like employment, education, health, property, etc. Consequently, although many Muslim women are ready to participate in politics, they are always threatened by Islamic laws and entrenched customs. Therefore, only few are successful in changing as political leaders. Muslim women also face the feudal and patriarchal setup which restricts their political participation by Islamic laws by issuing fatwa's. In India women do not have due representation in parliament as well as in state assemblies from their community. In addition, most of the key political parties, all the time wanted to restrict women's rights and equality, and also they intentionally deny women's political participation. In most of the Muslim societies, the fundamentalists urge the full submission of women to their husbands and expect them to always be obedient in the name of social order and religious

doctrines (Sohhan, 1994)].<sup>2</sup>

Here the study examine Muslim women empowerment or decision making capacity after enter into the political arena. There are five objectives given below relates to the decision making power of Muslim women representatives as a political member. At the same time the study observe their experience in the political field after getting a position of political member.

## METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected from Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam Malappuram and Kozhikode. Secondary data collected from various text books, Articles, journals, election commission's report etc. Stratified random sampling Method was used.

### Objectives

1. To examine the domain of Decision making power of Elected Muslim women.
2. To Study have freedom to take any decision in election activities and also decision making power at work place (LSG).
3. To examine have taken the decisions of office meeting and colleagues are agree with your decisions.
4. To Study have consider your male colleagues of your opinions in decision making bodies.
5. To observe have manage various problems in everyday life with come to you.

This domain carrying five questions and three point scale answers are considered, weighted average of each category is taken and cross tabulated into background variable. Percentage distribution is done for assessing their decision making power for each category and the results are given in the following. Womens political participation is closely related to their level of empowerment so the present study examine the Muslim Womens empowerment at various level.

The aim of the survey is to find the impact of 50 percentage reservation in the political empowerment of Muslim women in Kerala. Data was collected from the six districts of Kerala. The sample unit was a Muslim Woman who was elected as a Member of a Local Self Govt bodis in Kerala. This part discusses political decision making of the Muslim women representatives in LSG bodies. The major variables are as age, marital status, education, place of residence and type of family and also

political background are analyzed and the results are as given below. First of all the study examine the how much age impacted the empowerment process of the political decision making capacity women politicians.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Political Empowerment among Muslim women representatives of LSG in Kerala.

Fifty percent reservation has increased the number of women politicians in Social Governing Bodies. The political awareness and participation can be considered as a measure of their empowerment. Women entry in politics makes women's political status improved. They got position in politics as member, president, chairperson etc. They get confidence and leadership quality. They stick on the political field. Political empowerment could enhance them at several positions and also this empowerment moves through various stages such as participation, decision making and able to take responsibility for those actions (Ranadive 2005).<sup>3</sup> So the present study tries to analyze the political empowerment among Muslim women representatives of LSG, in Kerala.

The present study considers five questions regarding political decision and each question has three point scale answers. Questions about decision taking on election activity, decision making on work place, how the male colleagues agree to their decisions, and male member attitude about their decisions and how they manage various problems are asked. The respondents revealed their experience as a member of LSG and also they shared their changes after enter into the political arena. The five questions and their answers are clubbed as domain of political decision making. Percentage analysis of domain of political decision making is done and results presented in the following tables.

### *Age of the Respondent:*

Almost all countries have set a minimum age of 18 years to vote in National Elections (<https://www.agemattersnow.org/>).<sup>4</sup> Distribution of respondents according to their age is presented in table 1. For the convenience of analysis, age is categorized into three groups: those below 25 years, between 25 and 45 years, and above 45 years. It is to be noted that majority of the sample population belongs to the age group 25 to 45 years of age. It accounts for 83.5 percent. Further to be noted is that out of the total 340 respondents 10 (3 percent) belong to below 25

years and the rest 46 of them (which accounts for 13.5 percent) are from above 45 years of age. Here majority of the political member come from 25-45 age group, these age groups were very active not only in politics but they were much participating in kudumbasree, Thozilurappu programme and other empowerment programmes.

**Table 1:** Age Wise Distribution of Respondent

| Age          | Frequency  | Percent      |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Below 25     | 10         | 3.0          |
| 25-45        | 284        | 83.5         |
| Above 45     | 46         | 13.5         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>340</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

### *Domain of political Decision Making*

Women's political participation is a fundamental necessity for gender equality and genuine democracy. It assists women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women (<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/>).<sup>5</sup> Political participation is an equal democratic right for women and men but it does not mean that women have the possibilities in entering the political arena as a men (Hust, 2005).<sup>6</sup> The present study tries to analyse women politicians' decision making capacity as a political member.

**Table 2:** Domain of Political decision making

| -         | Frequency (Percent) | Total     |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
| Always    | 122 (35.9)          | 340 (100) |
| Sometimes | 145 (42.6)          | 340 (100) |
| Never     | 73 (21.5)           | 340 (100) |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

Out of the 340 respondents, 122 (35.9 percent) reported they always took decisions and the others agreed their decisions, and they could manage various problems in their work place. In the case of 145 (42.6 percent) of representatives sometimes they could take political decisions. Sometimes they can tell difficulties in the political field or working place. Sometimes male colleagues did not agree or consider their decisions in workplace and the political sphere. Again it is noted that 73 respondents (21.5 percent) reported that they could never make decision on political sphere. Initial stage they certain women politicians have no much experience in their political life. But after enter into the political field their life have changed drastically.

### *Political decision making by age*

Result of age wise analysis of political decision making among Muslim women representatives is presented in table 3

**Table 3:** Domain of Political decision making by age

| Age          | Frequency        | Percent          |                 | Total           |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|              | Always           | Sometimes        | Never           |                 |
| Below 25     | 3(30)            | 5(50.0)          | 2(20.0)         | 10(100)         |
| 25-45        | 103(36.3)        | 134(47.2)        | 47(16.5)        | 284(100)        |
| Above 45     | 16(34.8)         | 6(13.0)          | 24(52.2)        | 46(100)         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>122(35.9)</b> | <b>145(42.6)</b> | <b>73(21.5)</b> | <b>340(100)</b> |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

Consider the younger age group, 30 percent (3) reported that they could always take political decisions, 50 percent (5) reported they could make political decision sometimes only and 20 percent (2) reported that they could never take decisions.

Look at the age group 25-45 years age, 36.3 percent (103) reported they always could take political decisions, again it is noted 47.2 percent (134) reported they could take political decisions sometimes only. In the case of 16.5 percent (47) respondents, they reported that could never take political decisions.

While among the Muslim women representatives who belong to the age above 45 years 34.8 percent (16) reported they always took political decisions, 13.0 percent (6) reported sometimes they could take political decisions and 52.2 percent (24) reported that they could never take political decisions.

Results pointed out that one fifth of the Muslim women can never take political decision making in the workplace. Difficulties to take political decisions are more among the Muslim women representatives who belong to age group of above 45 years. In this category half of the respondents reported that they could never take political decisions.

### *Place of Residents of the Respondents*

The study shows that place of residents of the respondents. Majority of the sample population from rural area which is 68.8 percent. Only 31.2 percent of the respondents reported that they were from the urban area.

**Table 4:** Place of Residents

| Place of Residents | Frequency  | Percent    |
|--------------------|------------|------------|
| Rural              | 234        | 68.8       |
| Urban              | 106        | 31.2       |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>340</b> | <b>100</b> |

Political decision making by place of residence

Table explains the political decisions making among Muslim women representatives by place of residence

**Table 5:** Domain of Political decision making by place of residence

|              | Frequency        | Percent          |                 | Total           |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|              | Always           | Sometimes        | Never           |                 |
| Rural        | 84(35.9)         | 97(41.5)         | 53(22.6)        | 234(100)        |
| Urban        | 38(35.8)         | 48(45.2)         | 20(19.0)        | 106(100)        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>122(35.9)</b> | <b>145(42.6)</b> | <b>73(21.5)</b> | <b>340(100)</b> |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

Regarding the Muslim women representatives in rural areas the table shows that 35.9 percent (84) reported that they always took political decisions, 41.5 percent (97) reported they could sometimes take political decisions and 22.6 percent (53) reported they could never take political decisions.

With regards to the Muslim women respondents from urban areas, 35.8 percent (38) reported they could always take political decision in their work place. While 45.2 percent (48) reported they could take decisions sometimes. In the case of 19 percent respondents (20), they can never take political decisions.

Results of the Political decisions making capacities among Muslim women representatives for rural and urban areas show there is no significant difference between the two groups. The results suggest that Muslim women representatives have some difficulties in decision making at their working area. Similar pattern is observed in rural and urban members.

### *Political decision making by marital status*

#### *Marital Status of the Respondents*

Generally and historically, women are restricted by customs, tradition and ethical responsibilities, especially those from the Muslim community. After marriage their status turns as a house wife. Their responsibility lies as a wife, mother, child bearing, and care taking of the family members in a traditionally male dominated society. Therefore the duties of women are limited within the four walls of the home. But today the situations have changed. Women today are engaged not only in the political field, but they have shown their strength and proficiency in all sectors on equal terms with men. From this point, the study analyzes the marital status of the respondents and the results are depicted in Fig. 1.

The figure illustrates that out of the total Muslim

women under consideration, 87.4 percent of them are currently married and 10.3 percent are widows. Very few of them are legally divorced. It is interestingly noted that none of the study population is never married.

After marriage they have to shoulder the responsibility, in the name of house wife, of taking care of the family members besides their husband (and children). Responsibility as a mother and wife come upon their shoulders.

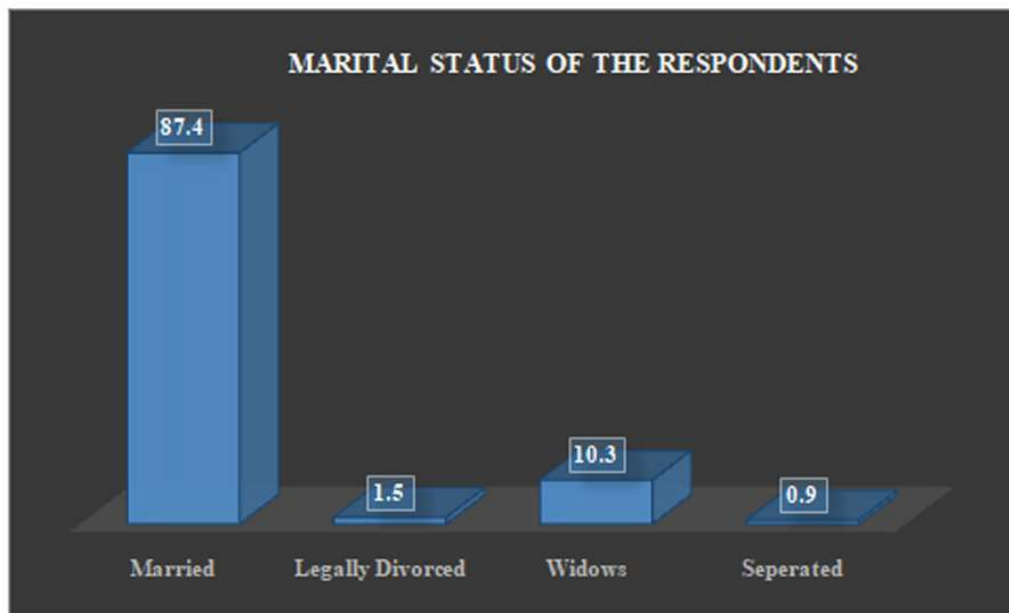


Fig. 1: Marital Status of the Respondents

### *Political Decision Making by Marital Status*

Political decision making among Muslim women

representatives by their marital status is analyzed and the results presented in table 6.

Table 6: Domain of Political decision making by marital status

|              | Frequency<br>Always | Percent<br>Sometimes | Never            | Total            |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Married      | 111 (37.4)          | 138 (46.5)           | 48 (16.2)        | 297 (100)        |
| Divorced     | 1 (12.5)            | 3 (37.5)             | 4 (50.0)         | 8 (100)          |
| Widows       | 10 (28.6)           | 4 (11.4)             | 21 (60.0)        | 35 (100)         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>122 (35.9)</b>   | <b>145 (42.6)</b>    | <b>73 (21.5)</b> | <b>340 (100)</b> |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

From the table, among the married Muslim women representatives 37.4 percent reported they could always take political decisions at their working place. 46.5 percent reported that they could not take political decisions at all times. They could take decisions sometimes only. Further, it is noted that 16.2 percent reported that they could never take decisions at their working place.

Regarding the Muslim women representatives who are divorced, the table shows only 12.5 percent respondents reported they could always take decisions at their working place. While 37.5 percent respondents reported that they could

take decisions at some times only. Half of the respondents reported that they could never take decisions at their working place.

Among the Muslim women representatives who are widows, 28.6 percent of them reported that they always took decisions, 11.4 percent of them reported they sometimes took decisions and 60 percent of them reported they never took decisions at their working place. Family support is most significant part of the political field. Political decision making by marital status reveals that those respondents who are divorced or widowed are more unable to take political decisions compared to

married women respondents.

### *Political Decision Making by Education*

#### *Education Status of the Respondents*

Education plays a vital role in deciding one's position and status. Education is one of the social points having a bearing on the achievement and the growth of an individual as well as community (Devi, 2014). Education can help women or anyone to know the present rules and regulations of present society or working area. Education helps them mingle with the public without difficulty. Political members attend various meetings, get together and many events related to politics and non-political

engagements in the society. Thus, education helps them for creating a better relationship with the people. The educational qualifications of the sample population are illustrated in Fig. 2.

All the Muslim women representatives in the sample are literate, even though 47 percent has only high school level of education. Further, it is to be noted that percentage of the college educated (degree and above) is only 16 percent. Again, 21 percent of the representatives have reported that they have higher secondary level of education. Therefore, the present sample shows that all of the Muslim women representatives have the capacity to read and understand the rules and regulations and related matters.

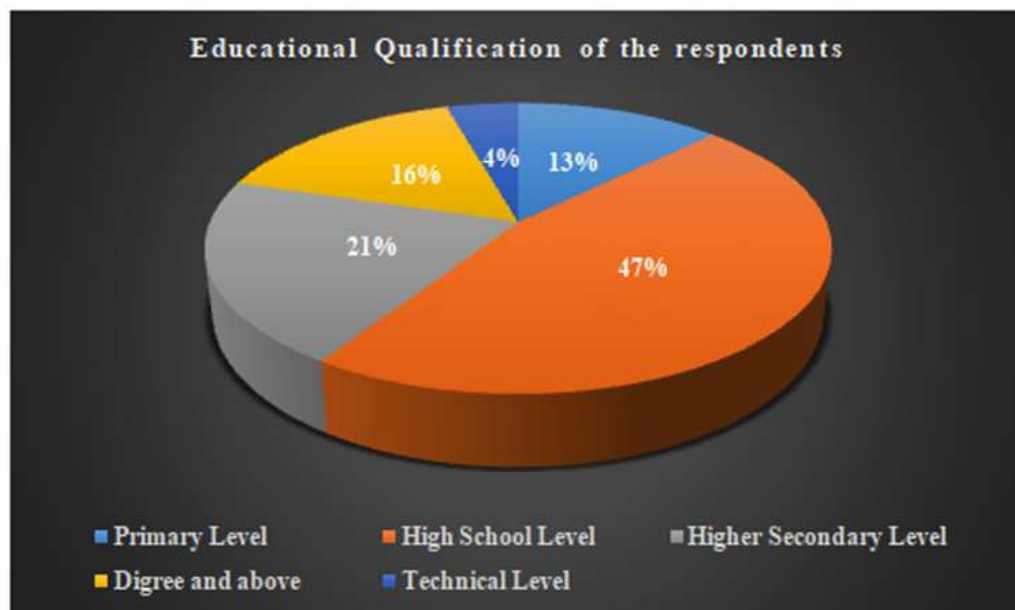


Fig. 2: Education Qualification of the Respondents

Result of educational wise analysis of political decision making is given in table

Table 7: Domain of Political decision making by type of education

|                     | Frequency<br>Always | Percent<br>Sometimes | Never            | Total            |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Primary Education   | 8 (18.6)            | 9 (20.9)             | 26 (60.5)        | 43 (100)         |
| High School         | 66 (41.8)           | 68 (43.0)            | 24 (15.2)        | 158 (100)        |
| Higher Secondary    | 20 (28.6)           | 35 (50.0)            | 15 (21.4)        | 70 (100)         |
| Degree and Above    | 20 (37.0)           | 31 (57.4)            | 3 (5.6)          | 54 (100)         |
| Technical Education | 8 (53.3)            | 2 (13.3)             | 5 (33.4)         | 15 (100)         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>122 (35.9)</b>   | <b>145 (42.6)</b>    | <b>73 (21.5)</b> | <b>340 (100)</b> |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

Among the Muslim women representatives who have primary level of education the table shows that 18.6 percent of respondents reported that they could always take political decisions. While

20.9 percent reported they sometimes could take decisions at their working place. While 60.5 percent of respondents could never take decisions at their working place.

Regarding the representatives who have high school level of education 41.8 percent reported that they always could take decisions at their working place. Further, it is noted that 43 percent of women representatives reported they sometimes could take political decisions and 15.2 percent of respondents reported they could never take political decisions.

Regarding the representatives who have higher secondary level of education 28.6 percent reported they could always take decisions, 50 percent reported that they sometimes could take decisions and 21.4 percent reported they never could take political decisions at their working place. Regarding the women representatives who qualified degree and above 37 percent always could take decisions, 57.4 percent could some time take decisions and 5.6 percent reported they could never take political decisions.

As far as the respondents who have technical education are concerned, 53.3 percent respondents reported that they always could take political decisions while 13.3 percent reported that they sometimes could take political decisions and 33.4 percent reported that they could never take decisions at their working place. Educational wise analysis reveals that decision-making capacity of the women politicians may increase as their level of education increases.

**Table 9:** Domain of Political decision making by type of family

|                | Frequency         | Percent           |                  |            |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|
|                | Always            | Sometimes         | Never            | Total      |
| Joint Family   | 16 (18.6)         | 43 (50.0)         | 27 (31.4)        | 86 (100)   |
| Nuclear Family | 93 (44.3)         | 99 (47.1)         | 18 (8.6)         | 210 (100)  |
| Extended       | 13 (29.5)         | 3 (6.8)           | 28 (63.7)        | 44 (100)   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>122 (35.9)</b> | <b>145 (42.6)</b> | <b>73 (21.5)</b> | <b>340</b> |

(Numbers in bracket indicate percentage)

Regarding the representatives who belong to joint family, 18.6 percent reported that they always could take decisions at their working place, 50.0 percent reported that they sometimes could take political decisions and 31.4 percent reported that they could never take political decisions at their working place.

Among the women representatives who are from nuclear family, 44.3 percent reported they always took decisions. While 47.1 percent reported that they sometimes could take political decisions, 8.6 percent reported could never can take political decisions at their working place.

Regarding the women representatives who are

### *Political decision making by type of family*

Table depicts the political decision making among Muslim women representatives by their type of family.

### *Family Type of Muslim Women representatives*

Table 8 gives the proportion of Muslim women representatives by type of family.

**Table 8:** Type of family of the Respondents

| Type of Family | Frequency  | Percent      |
|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Joint family   | 86         | 25.3         |
| Nuclear Family | 210        | 61.8         |
| Extended       | 44         | 12.9         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>340</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

More than half of the (61.8%) representatives in the sample belongs to nuclear family. One-fourth of the women representatives are from joint family. Again it is to be noted that 12.9 percent are from extended family. So the sample itself shows that Muslim women representatives are getting more support from nuclear family than those from joint and extended families. The emergence of nuclear family system may be the reason for getting more opportunities in participating in the public activities among women, compared to early period.

from extended family, the table reveals that 29.5 percent reported they always could takes decisions while 6.8 percent reported they sometimes could take decisions and 63.7 percent representatives reported that they could never take political decisions at their working place.

Political decisions making among Muslim women representatives by their type of family reveals that the women representatives from nuclear family are more able to take decisions at their working place. The results also reveals that women representatives who are from the extended family are less able to take political decisions at their working place.

The whole analysis reveals that one third of the

Muslim women representatives do make political decision to a great extent. Marital status, level of education and the type of family are the depending factors for achieving political empowerment among Muslim women representatives.

## CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the political empowerment among Muslim women representatives of LSG in Kerala. The term empowerment has a multiple meanings, here the study intended the word 'empowerment' is a political decision making capacity of Muslim women after enter into the Local Self Govt in Kerala. Fifty percentage reservation is the way of women entry into politics. This provides a space for women in a society. So they can take decisions or control over their family finance. Political participation also gave a reputed position in society and leadership quality. The present analysis concerns the Muslim women representatives of LSG in Kerala. On the basis of the analysis, the result shows that only one third of the women representatives have reported that they can always

take political decisions at their working place. So, the mere increase in the political representation is not enough to the women's political empowerment. In addition to the reservation, women should be given more opportunities in decision making process. Moreover, the opportunity to contest in general seats and attaining proper education can enhance their participation in the decision-making process in future.

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