

Political Participation of Muslim Women in Valluvanad: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Dynamics, and Emerging Challenges

Mr. Sainudeen. C.P¹, Dr. Augustin. J²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of History, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli-620024, India.

(cpssainu@gmail.com)

² Assistant Professor, Department of History, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli-620024, India.

(augustinjamesjmc@gmail.com)

Abstract: The political participation of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region of Kerala reflects a gradual transformation from historical marginalization to increasing democratic engagement. This study examines the historical background, contemporary dynamics, and emerging challenges related to the political participation of Muslim women in Valluvanad, a culturally significant region of Malabar. The study analyses the role of education, socio-religious reform movements, decentralized governance, and community organizations in promoting political awareness and participation among Muslim women. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected primary data through questionnaires and interviews among 120 respondents, supported by secondary sources such as government reports, historical records, scholarly articles, and Election Commission statistics. The findings reveal that Muslim women actively participate in voting, political discussions, local self-government institutions, and community organizations, particularly after the implementation of reservation policies in Kerala's Panchayati Raj system. However, their representation in higher political institutions such as the Lok Sabha and Kerala Legislative Assembly remains comparatively low. The study further identifies major challenges including patriarchal social structures, conservative socio-cultural attitudes, gender discrimination, limited leadership opportunities, lack of institutional support, and the difficulty of balancing family responsibilities with public life. The paper concludes that although educational advancement, social reform movements, and decentralized governance have improved political participation among Muslim women in Valluvanad, sustained institutional reforms, inclusive political strategies, and greater representation in higher political institutions are essential for achieving substantive political empowerment and democratic inclusion.

Keywords: Muslim women, political participation, Valluvanad, Malabar, Kerala, gender empowerment, local governance, decentralization, political representation, Panchayati Raj, socio-religious reform, democratic participation

Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, along with various United Nations resolutions, have strongly advocated women's empowerment and promoted social change towards gender equality (United Nations, 1995). In India, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

emphasised equal access and participation of women in social, political, and economic decision-making processes (Misra, 2001; Arfa Khan, 2025). Gender equality, particularly in decision-making bodies, is essential for genuine societal progress. Without meaningful representation of women in politics, the goals of development and democracy remain incomplete (Arfa Khan, 2025; Kumar, 2019). As Zenab Banu argues, women cannot achieve full development in society without genuine access to political participation and representation (Banu, 2016).

Although women's participation has increased across various fields in most democratic nations, the persistently low level of political participation among Muslim women even in a progressive and secular state like Kerala, remains a serious concern (Government of India, 2006; Arfa Khan, 2025). Political participation serves as a vital indicator of democratic inclusion and social empowerment. Despite Kerala's impressive human development indicators, significant gender disparities continue to exist within marginalised communities, especially among Muslim women (Government of India, 2006; Devika & Thampi, 2021).

The extent of people's involvement in decision-making processes significantly influences their overall development. Such participation enables them to articulate their specific challenges and priorities within legislative forums and contribute effectively to policy formulation (Kumar, 2019). Development may be understood as the collective endeavour to ensure that all sections of society enjoy a non-discriminatory environment and equitable opportunities for legal, social, and human advancement. Political and social transformations are central to this process. Individuals and groups striving for development challenge stagnation and regressive tendencies within existing political and social structures, thereby fostering transformative activities that reshape public perceptions and reorganise living conditions (Misra, 2001; Pandya, n.d.).

The status of women in India has fluctuated across different historical periods. In the early phases of Indian civilisation, women enjoyed rights relatively equal to those of men. However, their position gradually declined over time, leading to their exclusion from positions of power, prestige, and dignity (Pandya, n.d.; Misra, 2001). The share of Muslim women in political participation remains particularly low. They face double oppression as women and as members of a minority community that continues to experience educational, economic, and political backwardness (Government of India, 2006; Banu, 2016). In this context, the Valluvanad region of Malabar offers a significant case study due to its socio-cultural diversity, substantial Muslim population, and the historical impact of the Malabar Rebellion (Logan, 1887; Miller, 1976).

India's independence in 1947 and the adoption of the Constitution in 1950 granted women legal equality with men, including equal rights to participate in political processes and hold high public offices. Nevertheless, women in India have largely remained marginalised in the political sphere, often showing limited active engagement (Kumar, 2019; Misra, 2001). A major step forward came on 22 December 1992, when Parliament passed the Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Acts. These amendments promoted decentralisation and responded to demands from women's groups for greater political visibility (Rao, 2005; Joseph, 2019). Kerala implemented 50 percent reservation for women in local self-government institutions, resulting in a notable increase in women's political participation at the grassroots level (Election Commission of India; Devika & Thampi, 2010).

Several scholarly works have examined women's political participation, empowerment, and the socio-political conditions of Muslim women in India, with particular attention to Kerala. These studies provide a strong foundation for analysing the political marginalisation and emerging participation of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region. Zenab Banu (2016), in *Muslim Women in Political Process in India*, noted that Muslim women remain underrepresented in political institutions due to social

conservatism, lack of education, patriarchal control, and economic dependency. She stressed that political participation is crucial for women's empowerment and democratic inclusion. Kumar (2019) identified illiteracy, lack of political awareness, patriarchal attitudes, financial dependence, religious conservatism, and restricted mobility as major barriers to women's political empowerment, while highlighting how reservation policies in local self-government have enhanced women's visibility.

Mueen (2023), in *Empowerment through Reform: A Study of Mappila Muslim Women in Malabar*, highlighted the positive role of reform movements, educational initiatives, and community organisations in improving the social and educational status of Mappila Muslim women, although political participation continued to lag due to traditional gender norms and conservative social structures. Similarly, Arfa Khan (2025), in *Empowerment of Muslim Women in Politics: From Marginalization to Representation in India*, explained that Muslim women encounter multiple layers of discrimination based on gender, religion, and socio-economic status. She emphasised the importance of education, political awareness, reservation policies, and civil society support in strengthening their political participation. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) also identified Muslim women as one of the most disadvantaged groups in India with regard to literacy, employment, and political representation.

Historical studies such as William Logan's *Malabar Manual* (1887) offer valuable background on the socio-cultural structure of Malabar society and the condition of the Mappila community. Achyudanda Pandya, in *Situating Indian Women*, discussed how patriarchal systems historically excluded women from authority and decision-making roles. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that, despite constitutional safeguards, educational reforms, and decentralisation policies aimed at enhancing women's representation, Muslim women continue to confront structural, cultural, and socio-economic barriers that limit their active involvement in political decision-making processes (Banu, 2016; Arfa Khan, 2025; Government of India, 2006).

Focus of the Area

This paper examines the changing role of Muslim women in Malabar politics, highlighting how traditional gender norms both constrained and shaped their political empowerment. It explores the role of community organizations in promoting women's education and examines the influence of education on social, familial, and political structures (Mueen, 2023). Men were often unwilling to provide Muslim women with the place they deserved in society and consequently kept them away from positions of power. Halima Beevi emphasized that society cannot progress without the empowerment of Muslim women. Thinkers like her argued that through education Muslim women could improve their domestic lives, gain a place in public life, and contribute to the upliftment of society and politics (Mueen, 2023; Banu, 2016).

The deterioration in decision-making among Muslim political leadership has often been cited as one of the major reasons for Muslim backwardness (Government of India, 2006). After the formation of the state of Kerala, the Indian Union Muslim League handled the education department for significant periods. However, the Muslim League has often been criticized for not adopting a broad and progressive educational policy beyond narrow political considerations. It is particularly in Malabar, where the Muslim League has strong influence, that Muslims continue to experience major educational difficulties (Mueen, 2023; Logan, 1887). Despite constitutional mechanisms intended to ensure women's political participation, progress toward adequate political representation for Muslim women remains limited (Arfa Khan, 2025; Kumar, 2019).

This study therefore seeks to examine the political priorities of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region of Malabar in Kerala. It raises several important questions: Has the Constitutional Amendment succeeded in ensuring the political empowerment of Muslim women? If political empowerment has not been achieved, what factors continue to hinder it? Do Muslim women face difficulties in presenting their issues within public spaces? Beyond their identity as women, what additional challenges do they encounter as Muslim women because of their limited political participation? (Banu, 2016; Government of India, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to examine Muslim women's political participation and its factors in Valluvanad region. As part of the data collection, a questionnaire (Google Form) was prepared that included the necessary information, distributed it among about 120 people, and its responses were collected. A descriptive-analytical design was used, combining historical analysis to trace social, cultural, and educational factors influencing political engagement, alongside contemporary data to assess electoral representation. The analytical framework combines gender studies and political sociology, focusing on structural and cultural determinants of participation. The study area includes the major taluks under valluvanad region that historically significant during the Malabar Rebellion.

Selection of sample

The population comprised Muslim women active in local, state, and national politics. Quantitative data were sourced from the Election Commission of India and Panchayat records, covering Lok Sabha, Kerala Legislative Assembly, and local body elections. Qualitative insights were gathered via purposive interviews with women leaders, activists, and community reformers to understand their experiences and challenges. Secondary sources, including historical records, scholarly articles, government reports (e.g., Sachar Committee, 2006), newspapers, and archival materials, documented historical trends and engagement patterns.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and questionnaires targeting women voters and elected representatives, capturing demographic, educational, and political information. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) and comparative charts, while qualitative data underwent content analysis to identify recurring themes such as education, social reform, patriarchal barriers, and political mobilization, Community organizations with cross-validation from secondary sources ensuring accuracy and reliability. Policy reports and historical records, Case studies of political organizations in Malabar etc. also consider to collect the information regarding the same.

Historical Context of Muslim Women in Valluvanad

Geographically, the Valluvanad Taluk was bounded on the north by Ernad Taluk and portions of the Nilgiris District, on the east by Coimbatore District, on the south by Palakkad Taluk, Cochin State, and Ponnani Taluk, and on the west by the Ponnani and Ernad Taluks (Logan, 1887). The total area of the taluk was 963 square miles (137,417 acres, or roughly 214 square miles) (Logan, 1887). Valluvanad constituted one of the early administrative divisions of the Chera Kingdom. At its height, it extended from the Arabian Sea to the Attappadi hills and from the Nila River up to Melattur (Logan, 1887). The region changed hands among various powers, including the Zamorin of Calicut and Tipu

Sultan, interspersed with periods of local self-rule (Logan, 1887). Under British rule, most of the area came under the Valluvanad Taluk of the Madras Presidency. Following independence and the formation of Malappuram District, the historic region was divided among the present-day districts of Malappuram, Palakkad, and Thrissur (Kerala Gazetteers Department, n.d.; Logan, 1887).

Muslim women in Valluvanad, a historically significant region spanning parts of present-day Malappuram, Palakkad, and Thrissur districts, form an integral part of the broader Mappila Muslim community of Kerala. Their history reflects a dynamic blend of local traditions, Islamic influences, and evolving social changes over time (Mueen, 2023; Miller, 1976). Muslims in this region predominantly belong to the Mappila community and follow Shafi and Hanafi jurisprudential traditions. The community evolved through early Arab trade contacts along the Malabar Coast, intermarriages between Arab traders and local women, Sufi missionary activities, and subsequent conversions of local populations seeking social mobility (Logan, 1887; Miller, 1976; Ahmad, 2009).

Traditional Role of Muslim Women

Most Muslim families in the Valluvanad region trace their origins to converts from backward caste groups (Logan, 1887; Miller, 1976). These sections of society, long denied access to education under the caste system, continued to experience educational backwardness even after embracing Islam (Government of India, 2006; Chakravarti, 2003). Women, in particular, strongly upheld traditional caste norms, a pattern that remained pronounced among Muslim women. Many local superstitions and customs persisted even after conversion (Mueen, 2023). Muslim women generally lived within a male-dominated family system, while orthodox ulema often discouraged modern education for girls (Banu, 2016; Mernissi, 1991). As a result, literacy rates among Muslim women remained significantly lower than those of women from other communities (Government of India, 2006; Nair, 2022). The lack of modern education and social awareness severely restricted their entry into the political sphere (Kumar, 2019; Yasmeen, 2017).

Historically, Muslim women in Valluvanad were largely confined to domestic responsibilities. They shared many socio-cultural characteristics with Mappila women across Malabar, including distinctive styles of dress and rich oral traditions (Miller, 1976). Historical sources indicate that Muslim girls were often raised in seclusion in accordance with prevailing community norms (Logan, 1887; Hasan, 1998). However, the Holy Quran affirms that human beings were created for service and worship (Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56). The Sachar Committee Report (2006) similarly highlighted the continued social and educational backwardness of the Muslim community in India (Government of India, 2006).

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reform movements and educational initiatives gradually transformed women's roles by introducing modern ideas through schooling (Mueen, 2023; Devika, 2007). Access to education improved progressively for both men and women, with rising enrolment in higher educational institutions over time (Government of India, 2006; Nair, 2022). Women slowly began participating in community organisations and local governance bodies (Joseph, 2019; Kumar, 2019).

In the contemporary period, Muslim women in Valluvanad and the wider Malabar region have achieved significantly higher literacy rates compared to previous generations. Their participation in decision-making processes has also increased, contributing substantially to the progress of the community (Arfa Khan, 2025; Nair, 2022). Traditional attitudes among community leaders have gradually evolved due to women's active involvement in various spheres of social life (Banu, 2016; Mueen, 2023).

Political Participation: The Concept

In simple terms, participation means to share or take part in an activity. In the political context, the concept carries a more specific meaning. Political participation refers to the actions through which ordinary members of a political system seek to influence or actually influence political outcomes (Kumar, 2019; Pateman, 1970). It involves the direct and voluntary engagement of citizens, either individually or through representatives, in public affairs. Participation cannot be imposed from above; it must arise from people's willingness to engage. It also serves as an important mechanism for reducing power inequalities and advancing social justice (Misra, 2001; Philips, 1995).

Political participation encompasses any organised activity that influences or seeks to influence power relations in society. Key indicators include attending public meetings, participating in agitations, joining study circles of political parties, voting in elections, campaigning, becoming members of political parties, and securing representation in elected bodies (Kumar, 2019). For women, political participation includes four major dimensions: (i) as voters; (ii) as members of political parties; (iii) as elected representatives in Parliament, State Assemblies, and local self-government institutions; and (iv) as members of women's organisations (Banu, 2016; Rai, 2020).

The political participation of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region of Malabar has been steadily increasing. This has enabled them to articulate issues affecting their lives in legislative and public forums (Arfa Khan, 2025; Thomas, 2018). Recent scholarship shows that Muslim women in Malabar have gradually moved from the margins to the mainstream through education and social reform movements (Mueen, 2023; Shirin, 2023). Patriarchal norms and conservative interpretations of religion historically restricted women's mobility and public engagement (Banu, 2016; Hasan, 1998). However, educational expansion and reform movements in Kerala have played a transformative role in generating political awareness and encouraging democratic participation among Muslim women (Government of India, 2006; Devika & Thampi, 2010).

Muslim women's political participation remains more visible in local governance institutions than in State or National legislatures. This trend became particularly evident after the implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts and Kerala's reservation policy for women in local self-government bodies (Rao, 2005; Election Commission of India, n.d.). Organisations such as the Vanitha League have played a vital role in developing leadership qualities, political awareness, and grassroots mobilisation among Muslim women (Mueen, 2023; Thomas, 2018). At the same time, scholars note the persistence of gender-based political roles shaped by community expectations and religious-cultural norms (Arfa Khan, 2025; Yasmeen, 2017).

Education has emerged as the single most important factor promoting political participation among Muslim women. Rising literacy levels have enhanced political awareness, improved access to information, and encouraged leadership roles (Government of India, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000). Women's wings of political parties have provided platforms for political training, electoral participation, and leadership development (Banu, 2016; Joseph, 2019). Although women play a crucial role in shaping the future of the nation, they continue to remain one of the most excluded groups in many aspects of political and social life (Misra, 2001; Karat, 2005).

Decentralized Governance

Kerala's Panchayati Raj system has significantly enhanced women's political participation through effective reservation policies. The state implemented a 50 percent reservation for women in local self-government institutions, which marked a major turning point in decentralised governance, particularly from 2010 onwards (Election Commission of India, n.d.; Joseph, 2019). This policy has

Political Participation of Muslim Women in
Valluvanad: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary
Dynamics, and Emerging Challenges

enabled women to engage more actively in decision-making and address issues related to their rights and social development (Misra, 2001; Devika & Thampi, 2010). For Muslim women, grassroots-level engagement has served as the primary pathway into politics, primarily through local governance institutions rather than higher legislative bodies such as the State Assembly or Parliament (Banu, 2016; Thomas, 2018).

Contemporary trends show increasing grassroots participation by Muslim women in Panchayats and municipal bodies across the Malabar region. Educational progress, growing political awareness, and the supportive role of community organisations and party women’s wings have enhanced their visibility in local governance (Mueen, 2023; Arfa Khan, 2025). Participation in Panchayati Raj institutions has offered Muslim women valuable opportunities for leadership, representation of community concerns, and contribution to local development, thereby strengthening their overall role in democratic processes (Kumar, 2019; Joseph, 2019)

The table show that the political representation of women as a voter in the Lok Sabha election that exposes the low-level representation of women compared with total percentage.

Voting representation of women in the Lok Sabha

The voting representation of women in Lok Sabha elections is an important indicator of women’s political participation and democratic involvement in India. The increase in female voter turnout over the years reflects the growing political awareness and active engagement of women in the electoral process. The table presents the participation of women voters in Lok Sabha elections from 1962 to 2019 based on Election Commission statistics.

Table 1 Voting representation of women in the Lok Sabha

Year	Total Voters	Total Female Voters	Voting Percentage (Female)	Total Percentage
1962	216372215	102427981	46.43	55.42
1967	249003334	119434730	55.48	61.33
1971	274094493	130619662	49.11	55.29
1977	321174327	154155176	54.91	60.49
1980	355590700	170380385	51.22	56.92
1984	379540608	182810109	58.60	63.56
1989	498906429	236861287	57.32	61.95
1991	498363801	236531302	51.35	56.93
1996	592572288	282756512	53.41	57.94
1998	605884103	289191475	57.88	61.97
1999	619559944	295723180	55.64	59.99
2004	671524575	322030439	53.47	57.82
2009	716985101	342226300	55.82	58.13
2014	834082814	397018915	65.54	66.44
2019	910512091	437806707	67.18	67.4

Sources: Election Commissioners Statistics

The table 1 show that the political representation of Muslim women as a Candidate in the Lok Sabha election that shows the participation of them in the legislative sphere is very low level representation compared with total percentage.

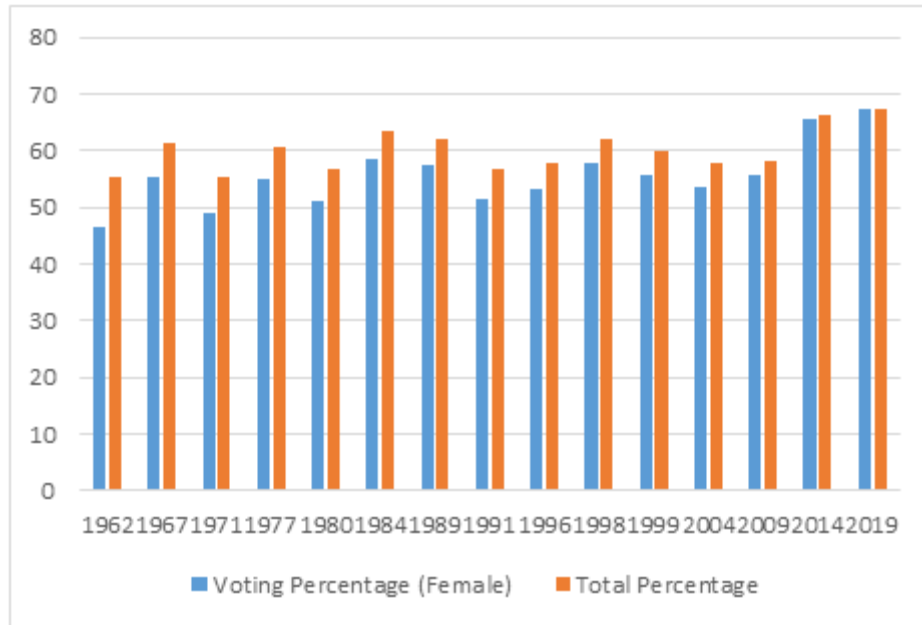


Figure 1 Voting representation of women in the Lok Sabha

Table 2 Representation of Muslim women in the Lok Sabha

Year	Total No. of Seats	Total No. of women candidate	Total No. of Women Members	% of Muslim Women Members
1952	489	24	0	0
1957	494	24	2	0.4
1962	494	36	2	0.4
1967	520	32	0	0
1971	521	27	0	0
1977	544	21	3	0.5
1980	544	32	2	0.3
1984	544	45	3	0.5
1989	259	28	0	0
1991	508	42	1	0.1
1996	541	41	2	0.3
1998	545	44	0	0
1999	543	52	1	0.1
2004	543	52	2	0.3

Political Participation of Muslim Women in Valluvanad: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Dynamics, and Emerging Challenges

2009	543	60	3	0.5
2014	543	62	2	0.3
2019	543	78	2	0.3
2024	543	74	2	0.3

Sources: Election Commissioners Statistics

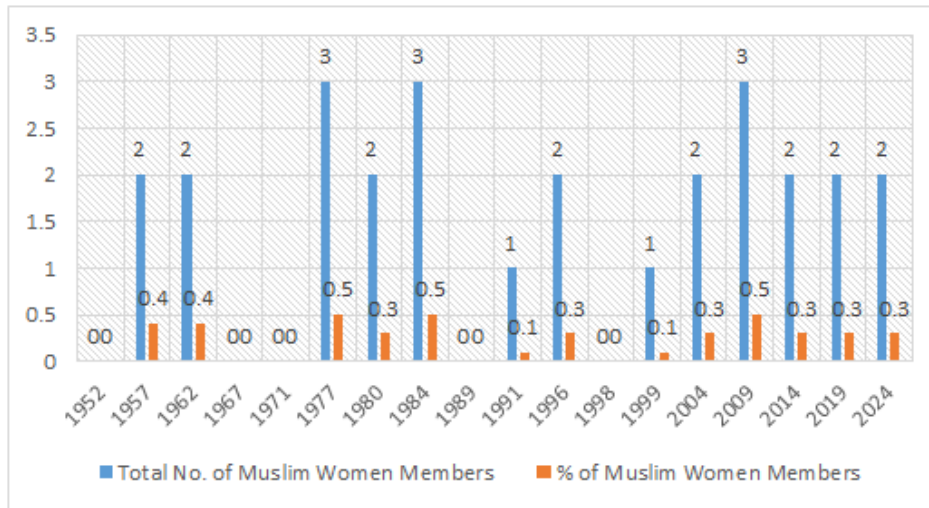


Figure 2 Representation of Muslim women in the Lok Sabha

Representation of Muslim women in the Legislative Assembly of Kerala

The participation of Muslim women in the Kerala Legislative assembly, which came into existence after the formation of the Kerala State is very low level and this results to reach in appropriate decision regarding them. A questionnaire (google form) was prepared and around 120 samples were collected to understand the political engagement of Muslim women in Valluvanad region. Others shows that the participation of Muslim women working in the community organizations, rather than mainstream political parties.

Table 3 Representation of Muslim women in the Legislative Assembly of Kerala

Sl. No.	Assembly Period	Total Women MLAs	Muslim Women MLAs	Percentage of Muslim Women among Total MLAs
1	1957–1960	6	0	0%
2	1960–1964	8	0	0%
3	1965–1967	7	0	0%
4	1967–1970	9	1	0.7%
5	1970–1977	10	1	0.7%
6	1977–1980	11	1	0.7%
7	1980–1982	13	1	0.7%
8	1982–1987	13	1	0.7%
9	1987–1991	14	1	0.7%

10	1991–1996	15	1	0.7%
11	1996–2001	18	2	1.4%
12	2001–2006	19	2	1.4%
13	2006–2011	20	2	1.4%
14	2011–2016	19	2	1.4%
15	2016–2021	8	2	1.4%
16	2021– Present	11	3	2.1%

Source: Election Commission Statistics; Statistical Reports of Kerala Legislative Assembly.

The table 3 shows that the representation of Muslim women in the Kerala Legislative Assembly has been very low since the formation of Kerala. For many years, only one or two Muslim women were elected, and their percentage remained below 2%.

Kinds of Political engagement of Muslim women in Valluvanad

The political engagement of Muslim women in Valluvanad reflects their growing participation in democratic and social activities. Their involvement ranges from voting and attending political meetings to participating in local self-government institutions and political campaigns. Studying the kinds of political engagement helps to understand the level of political awareness, empowerment, and participation of Muslim women in the region.

Table 4 Kinds of Political engagement of Muslim women in Valluvanad

No.	Sl. No.	Kinds of Political Engagement	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1		Voting in Elections	120	100%
2		Participation in Political Meetings	72	60%
3		Membership in Political Parties	38	31.7%
4		Campaign Activities	45	37.5%
5		Participation in Local Self-Government Activities	54	45%
6		Involvement in Women's Political Organizations	41	34.2%
7		Participation in Political Discussions	83	69.2%
8		Contesting in Elections	12	10%

Source: Field Survey conducted among Muslim women in Valluvanad (Sample Size = 120).

Political Participation of Muslim Women in Valluvanad: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Dynamics, and Emerging Challenges

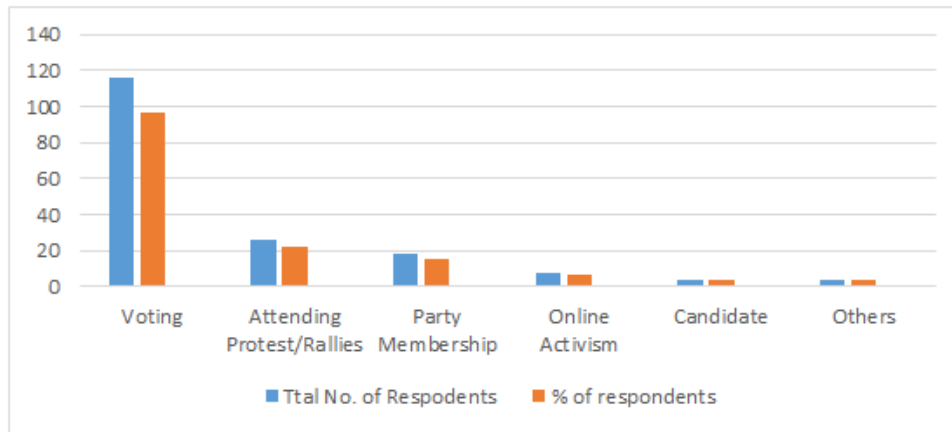


Figure 3 Kinds of Political engagement of Muslim women in Valluvanad

Motivating factors of Political engagement

The political engagement of Muslim women is influenced by various social, cultural, educational, and political factors. Their participation in political activities is often encouraged by family support, education, political awareness, social organizations, and democratic rights. At the same time, politically engaged Muslim women also face several challenges related to gender discrimination, religious stereotypes, social restrictions, and limited opportunities in leadership roles. To understand these motivating factors and challenges, a sample of 120 people was collected and analysed among Muslim women in the Valluvanad area.

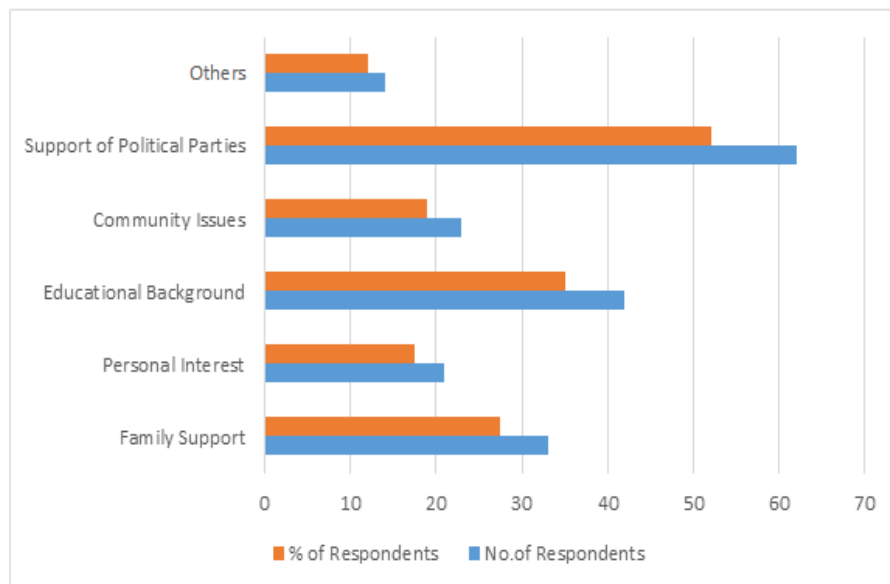


Figure 4 Motivating factors of Political engagement

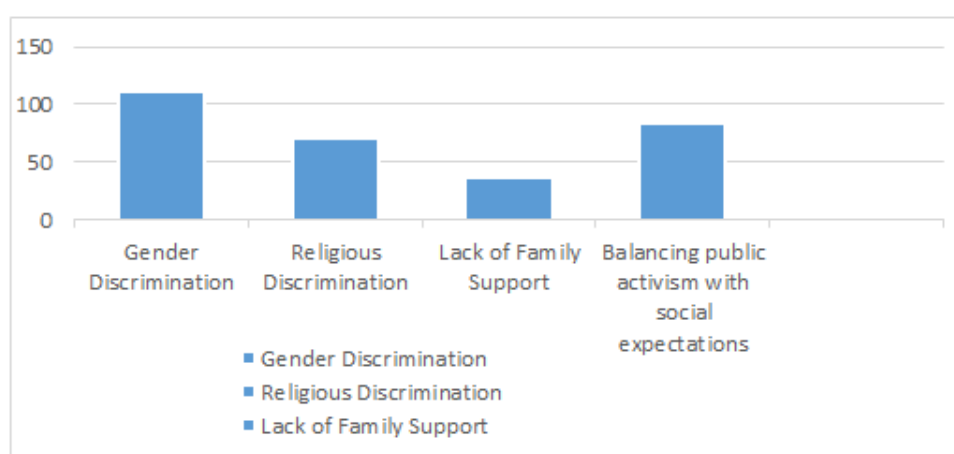
CHALLENGES OF POLITICALLY ENGAGED MUSLIM WOMEN

The political participation of Muslim women is often affected by several social, cultural, religious, and political barriers. Politically engaged Muslim women face challenges such as gender discrimination, lack of family and community support, limited leadership opportunities, religious stereotypes, social restrictions, and political marginalization. These challenges influence their active involvement and representation in political activities and decision-making processes. The study analyses the major challenges faced by politically engaged Muslim women in the Valluvanad area.

Table 5 Challenges of Politically Engaged Muslim Women in Valluvanad

Sl. No.	Challenges Faced	Percentage
1	Gender Discrimination	37%
2	Religious Discrimination	23%
3	Lack of Family Support	13%
4	Balancing Public Activism with Social Expectations	27%

Source: Field Survey conducted among Muslim women in Valluvanad.

**Figur 5 Challenges of Politically Engaged Muslim Women in Valluvanad**

The present study demonstrates that the political participation of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region has gradually evolved from historical marginalisation to greater involvement in grassroots democratic processes. Traditionally, Muslim women in Malabar encountered multiple socio-cultural constraints, including patriarchal family structures, conservative religious interpretations, limited access to education, and restricted mobility in public spaces. These factors collectively diminished their political visibility and participation (Banu, 2016; Government of India, 2006). This observation aligns with the findings of Mueen (2023), who highlighted how traditional gender norms and conservative community structures constrained the public roles of Mappila Muslim women in Malabar.

However, the results of this study indicate that educational advancements, socio-religious reform movements, and community-driven awareness programmes have significantly enhanced political consciousness, leadership capabilities, and public engagement among Muslim women in Valluvanad. These findings are consistent with recent scholarship emphasising the transformative impact of education and reform initiatives in Kerala on women's participation in democratic institutions and decision-making processes (Arfa Khan, 2025; Nair, 2022).

A key contribution of this research lies in underscoring the pivotal role of decentralised governance and reservation policies in advancing women's political participation. The implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, along with Kerala's 50 percent reservation for women in local self-government institutions, has created meaningful opportunities for Muslim women to engage in Panchayats and municipal bodies (Kumar, 2019). These outcomes corroborate earlier studies on Kerala's decentralisation experience, which found that local governance institutions serve as

critical platforms for leadership development, political socialisation, and grassroots mobilisation among women (Devika & Thampi, 2021).

The study further reveals that Muslim women's political participation remains considerably stronger at the local level than in higher legislative bodies such as the Kerala Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha. Engagement through women's organisations and party wings, particularly the Vanitha League, has played a constructive role in nurturing leadership skills and democratic participation (Mueen, 2023; Shirin, 2023). This pattern reflects a broader trend observed in India, where women's political representation is more pronounced in decentralised structures than in state and national legislatures despite constitutional provisions.

Despite these positive developments, several persistent barriers continue to impede the full political empowerment of Muslim women. These include entrenched gender discrimination, conservative socio-cultural attitudes, the challenge of balancing domestic responsibilities with public roles, inadequate institutional support from political parties, and limited access to higher leadership positions. Such constraints reinforce the "multiple marginality" faced by Muslim women on account of intersecting factors of gender, religion, and socio-economic status (Arfa Khan, 2025). These findings are consistent with national-level studies that highlight the underrepresentation of women, particularly from minority communities, in higher political institutions even after decades of reservation policies (Borah, 2021; Rai, 2020).

In conclusion, while educational progress, social reform movements, and decentralised governance mechanisms have substantially improved the political participation of Muslim women in Valluvanad, their representation in higher echelons of power remains limited. Achieving substantive political empowerment requires sustained efforts, including targeted leadership training programmes, greater support from mainstream political parties, enhanced representation in state and national legislatures, and continued community-level reforms. Future policy interventions and research should focus on addressing these structural and cultural barriers to ensure more inclusive and equitable political participation.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on gender, minority politics, and decentralisation in India by providing region-specific insights from Valluvanad, offering valuable implications for both academic understanding and policy formulation aimed at strengthening democratic inclusion.

Challenges

Although the political participation of Muslim women in the Valluvanad region has improved in recent years, several barriers still limit their active involvement in politics. Patriarchal social structures, conservative religious interpretations, low representation in higher political institutions, limited political opportunities, and gender discrimination continue to affect their participation. Educational and economic constraints, restrictions on social mobility, and the difficulty of balancing family responsibilities with public life also remain major challenges for politically active Muslim women.

Suggestions

The political empowerment of Muslim women can be strengthened through improved educational and political awareness programs, increased representation in political parties, and greater institutional support. Efforts should also be made to address patriarchal attitudes and promote gender-sensitive discussions within society. Economic empowerment, effective use of media and digital

platforms, and encouragement for research and documentation on Muslim women's political participation can further enhance their role in democratic and political processes.

CONCLUSION

The political participation of Muslim women in Valluvanad reflects a gradual transition from social marginalization to increasing involvement in democratic and public life. Historically, patriarchal traditions, conservative social attitudes, limited educational opportunities, and restricted access to public spaces hindered their participation in politics. However, educational advancement, social reform movements, decentralized governance, and the activities of community organizations have contributed significantly to improving political awareness and grassroots participation among Muslim women in the region.

The study reveals that Muslim women are now more visible in local self-government institutions, political discussions, and community-based organizations, particularly after the implementation of reservation policies in Kerala's Panchayati Raj system. Participation in local governance has enhanced their confidence, leadership qualities, and awareness of rights and social issues. At the same time, their representation in higher political institutions such as the Lok Sabha and the Kerala Legislative Assembly remains comparatively low.

Several challenges continue to restrict substantive political empowerment. Gender discrimination, conservative socio-cultural attitudes, limited political opportunities, and difficulties in balancing family responsibilities with public engagement still affect their active participation in politics. Therefore, the study concludes that sustained educational progress, inclusive political strategies, institutional support, and greater representation in higher political institutions are essential to ensure meaningful political empowerment and democratic inclusion of Muslim women in Valluvanad.

References

- Achyudanda Pandya, *Situating Indian Women*, Abhijet Publication, Delhi, P.25 \
- Arfa Khan. (2025). Empowerment of Muslim women in politics: From marginalization to representation in India. *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 10(3). ISSN 2455-3085.
- Banu, Z. (2016). *Muslim women in political process in India*. Shipra Publications.
- Borah, R. (2021). Women's political participation and representation in India: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 14(2), 45–58.
- Devika, J., & Thampi, B. V. (2021). *Women, governance and decentralization in Kerala*. Centre for Development Studies.
- Election Commission of India. (n.d.). *Statistical reports on Lok Sabha elections and women's political participation*. Government of India.
- Government of India. (2006). *Social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India: Sachar Committee report*. Prime Minister's High Level Committee.
- Holy Quran. (n.d.). Surah Adh-Dhariyat 51:56.
- Kumar, R. (2019). Factors affecting women's political participation and awareness. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanities*, 10(2). ISSN 2277-9807.
- Logan, W. (1887). *Malabar manual (Vols. 1–2)*. Low Price Publications.
- Miller, R. E. (1976). *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A study in Islamic trends*. Orient Longman.
- Misra, R. C. (2001). *Women in India: Towards gender equality*. Authors Press.
- Mueen, A. M. (2023). Empowerment through reform: A study of Mappila Muslim women in Malabar. *Kanpur Philosophers: International Journal of Humanities, Law and Social Sciences*, 10(1B). ISSN 2348-8301.

Political Participation of Muslim Women in Valluvanad: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Dynamics, and Emerging Challenges

- Nair, P. R. (2022). Education and political empowerment of Muslim women in Kerala. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 22(1), 67–81.
- Pandya, A. (n.d.). *Situating Indian women*. Abhijeet Publications.
- Rai, S. M. (2020). *Gender and political representation in India*. Oxford University Press.
- Rakesh Kumar. (2019). Factors affecting women's political participation and awareness. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanities*, 10(2). ISSN 2277-9807.
- Shirin, K. (2023). Muslim women, civil society, and political participation in Kerala. *South Indian Journal of Social Sciences*, 21(1), 88–102.
- United Nations. (1995). *Beijing declaration and platform for action*. Fourth World Conference on Women.
- Zenab Banu. (2016). *Muslim women in political process in India*. Shipra Publishers.
- Agarwal, B. (1994). *A field of one's own: Gender and land rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ahmad, I. (2009). Islam, democracy and citizenship among Indian Muslims. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(8), 45–52.
- Ali, A. (2014). Muslim women and political participation in India: Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 3(4), 45–49.
- Ansari, M. A. (2017). Political participation among Muslim women in Kerala: A sociological analysis. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 3(2), 117–130.
- Bhat, M. A. (2018). Women and local governance in India: Participation and representation. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(7), 230–242.
- Chakravarti, U. (2003). *Gendering caste through a feminist lens*. Popular Prakashan.
- Desai, N., & Thakkar, U. (2001). *Women in Indian society*. National Book Trust.
- Devika, J. (2007). *En-gendering individuals: The language of re-forming in early twentieth century Kerala*. Orient Longman.
- Devika, J., & Thampi, B. V. (2010). Between "empowerment" and "liberation": The Kudumbashree initiative in Kerala. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 17(1), 33–60.
- Engineer, A. A. (2001). *The rights of women in Islam*. Sterling Publishers.
- Hasan, Z. (1998). *Forging identities: Gender, communities and the state in India*. Kali for Women.
- Hashemi, N. (2013). Muslim women and political empowerment in South Asia. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 19(3), 55–74.
- Jeffrey, R. (1992). *Politics, women and well-being: How Kerala became "a model"*. Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, A. (2019). Decentralization and women's political participation in Kerala. *Journal of Political Studies*, 27(2), 91–104.
- Karat, B. (2005). *Survival and emancipation: Notes from Indian women's struggles*. Three Essays Collective.
- Kumar, N. (2016). Women's representation in Indian politics: Challenges and opportunities. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 62(4), 705–719.
- Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan Publications.
- Mernissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. Addison-Wesley.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Omvedt, G. (1993). *Reinventing revolution: New social movements and the socialist tradition in India*. M.E. Sharpe.
- Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Philips, A. (1995). *The politics of presence*. Oxford University Press.
- Rao, N. (2005). Women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(44/45), 4746–4752.

Rege, S. (2003). *Writing caste/writing gender: Narrating Dalit women's testimonios*. Zubaan.

Sikand, Y. (2005). *Muslims in India since 1947: Islamic perspectives on inter-faith relations*. Routledge.

Tharakan, M. (2004). Historical hurdles in the course of the people's planning campaign in Kerala. *Social Scientist*, 32(1/2), 75–82.

Thomas, P. (2018). Muslim women and grassroots politics in Kerala. *South Asian Journal of Socio-Political Studies*, 18(1), 66–79.

Yasmeen, S. (2017). Gender, religion and political participation among Muslim women in India. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37(4), 512–526