

Female empowerment in kerala



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ABSTRACT : There has been a spate of discussions at various levels especially at the the top hierarchy of the successive governments with reference to apprehension of women empowerment in our country India. Besides it has also been a meeting point of contradicting themes that has resulted in a status quo. The women who stand to gain from governmental measures are already empowered and the vast majority of them, who mostly hail out from rural regions , are still regarded inferior to men in most spheres. In view of this the present paper makes an attempt to highlight how it contradicts as in the state of Kerala which has created a congenial atmosphere for the emergence of women empowerment and development of women entrepreneurship through Kudumbashree. ' Kudumbashree' , which mean prosperity (shree) ' of the family (Kudumbam) is the name of the women oriented, community based, State Poverty Eradication Mission of Government of Kerala . Kerala is a tiny state lying in the south-west part of Indian federation, where many development experiments are being tested, refined and implemented. The mission aims at the empowerment of women, through forming self-help groups and encouraging their entrepreneurial or other wide range of activities. The purpose of the mission is to ensure that the women should no longer remain as passive recipients of public assistance, but active leaders in women involved development initiatives.

Keywords : women empowerment, contradicts , active leaders, Kerala

OBJECTIVES : The present paper makes an attempt to highlight the success stories associated to women empowerment, initiatives taken, incentives provided by a unit named Kudumbashree operating widely in the state of Kerala.

INTRODUCTION: Women in business is a recent phenomenon in India. They have confined themselves to petty business and tiny cottage industries. They are found in vegetable selling, making pickles, papads etc The spread of education and increased awareness are aiding women to spread their wings into the areas which were the monopoly of men. On the whole, proper education of women in Kerala resulted in high motivation among them to enter into business. The financial, marketing and training assistance provided by the State Government also helped motivate women to assume entrepreneurial career. Women's desire to work at the place of residence, difficulty of getting jobs in the public and private sectors and the desire for social recognition also motivated women in Kerala for self -development. Kudumbashree was launched by the Government of Kerala in 1998 for wiping out absolute poverty from the State through concentrated community action under the leadership of Local Self Governments, Kudumbashree is today one of the largest women-empowering projects in the country. The programme has 37 lakh members and covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala. Built around three critical components, microcredit, entrepreneurship and empowerment, the Kudumbashree initiative has today succeeded in addressing the basic needs of the less privileged women, thus providing them a more dignified life and a better future. Real empowerment occurs only when rights can be legitimately claimed and are universally acknowledged. It is the endeavor of Kudumbashree to bring the discussion on women's rights and issues into the heart of the development debate. The organisational structure and capacity building programmes of kudumbashree attempt to develop the leadership capabilities and opportunities for intervention in development activities. The Gender Self Learning Programme <https://assignbuster.com/female-empowerment-in-kerala/>

is a unique experiment to consolidate women's voices and discuss gender disparities.

OVERVIEW:

The network of Kudumbashree projects across Kerala is beginning to bear fruits not only in the form of fiscal independence for women but also with a new found self confidence. Kerala is witnessing a silent revolution, spawning womanpower, possibly restoring to the State its lost matriarchal legacy, where the women enjoyed pre-eminence, safety, security and respect, including self-respect. This female empowerment is taking place through the Kudumbashree movement, which has engulfed the State. In Ernakulam district alone there are 19, 2424 women in rural and urban areas contributing Rs. 22 crores through deposits to the State economy. Each member contributes Rs 10 a week, which is achieved through a phenomenal feat by trusting women, awakening their inherent saving instinct and abilities to achieve. From the thrift amount loans are granted to them which they return in just three weeks. Loans upto Rs. 26 crores are given to them. Earlier, they had no money of their own to spend or invest. Now they have achieved monetary empowerment, self-reliance and freedom," said Kabir B. Haroon, District Mission Co-ordinator of Kudumbashree in Ernakulam.

When one re-scripts their earlier life scenario it is easy to recapture the anguish and trauma they would have experienced in situations, as when school opened. " They had to buy bags, books, umbrellas etc. for their children and often they never had the money for it and had to borrow from blade companies, paying exorbitant interest. Now they say, quite proudly,

that they are borrowing from their own investments. Similarly, they take loans from their own deposits to celebrate Onam, Christmas or Bakri id. Many of them say that they have lost their enslavement because they are not dependent on anyone anymore. Kudumbashree alone has collected Rs. 230 crores as deposits and lent Rs 320 crores as loans.

Across Kerala, Kudumbashree covers 991 panchayats and 58 municipalities. Through this network women have the freedom to demand, and to receive money without red tape. In fact, banks volunteer to lend money to Ayalkoottams. Like the Dhanalakshmi Bank, which plans to lend Rs. 300 crores to Kudumbashree Ayalkoottams alone, testifying the credibility and investor confidence the women have inspired under the Kudumbashree network.

Each Community Development Society (CDS) under the Kundumbasree project is an independent entity, registered under the Charitable Society Act, sans governmental interference. Everyone gets to share responsibility as office bearers, but not more than twice. There are health and education volunteers, infrastructure volunteers, income-generation volunteers, a secretary, and a president, who heads but does not rule. Since the role of Mayor or Panchayat president is limited, the women face no interference or influence from men, unlike in the Panchayat where political influences and husbands often rule by proxy. The women are free to present crucial issues like water, power or housing before the Grama Sabha under the Ayalkootam network.

The flagship of the Ernakulam Kudumbashree is the Kuttampuzha tribal belt where the women are so empowered that they have been able to control the price line in the Kothamangalam belt and even ban arrack, both its brewing and consumption. The women engage jeeps to buy provisions and vegetables in bulk and sell them to members at the cheapest possible price, thus controlling the prices in the area. This is the impact of women in Kuttampuzha, Earlier, rice had to be distributed to adivasis to prevent starvation deaths. Now it is the Kudumbasree, which ensures that adivasis get their quota of rice. In this adivasi belt the thrift deposit amount is Rs. 44 lakhs and the loans amount to Rs. 80 lakhs.

These poor women become conscious not only of fiscal saving but also about saying that they have effectively managed plastic ban by introducing cloth bags and have started using areca-nut frond (*Paala*) as plates at functions not only to boost plastic ban but also to protect the areca trees. Women have also taken over the sale of tender coconuts and have started manufacturing 'Kerashree' coconut oil. The snowball ice cream is another new and popular venture of these women. Made out of tender coconut, which is not slit open to extract the tender flesh, but is stirred inside and drunk, using a straw has gained popularity among foreign tourists. This project is under the aegis of Centre for Spices and Research, Government of India.

IT SECTOR

Women under the Kudumbasree have also entered the IT field through data entry and in assembling units. Kudumbashree computer centre has

developed hardware for printing ration card, etc. Kudumbashree units also impart IT education in 158 schools in Kerala, with a Rs. 10 crores grant from the Union Govt. Six girls in each unit acquire the skill to teach students of classes eight and nine, under this scheme. Kudumbashree women are acquiring computer literacy and also supply computer hardware to such schools.

TOURISIM AND ALLIED SECTORS

The Kudumbashree is having an impact across Kerala. In Fort Kochi, the beach is cleaned and maintained by the women, who collect Rs. 1200 for it from the Tourism Department. They also maintain the heritage zone . Women have also stepped in to produce ethnic fast food with help from the Syndicate Bank. They manufacture bakery items and reach them directly to houses, as well as provisions, like rice, soaps tea etc; often earning up to Rs. 16, 000 a month. There are at least 450 women in this field, who have sold around Rs. 18 lakhs worth provisions during the 10 days of Onam collecting Rs. 3, 000 each in the bargain.

DIRECT MARKETING

Direct marketing has become the hallmark of Kudumbashree thus eliminating middlemen and ensuring that actual profits reach the producer. There are 45 direct marketing units in Ernakulam District. In all, Kudumbashree has effected a healthy change in the Kerala scenario. The women have become self-confident under it and they have regained their individuality and also gives an avenue to step out, to interact, to expand their horizons which is no more limited to the four walls of our homes.

- EMPOWERMENT STORIES UNDER THE ROOF OF KUDUMBASHREE

1. NOW WOMEN CAN CLIMB COCONUT TREES (December 15, 2009)

Climbing coconut trees is considered to be the monopoly of men, and increasingly it is felt that there are fewer people to climb. These views may be a thing of the past as Kudumbashree and Raidco initiated a tree climbing training programme. A package has been developed, where the equipment costing Rs 2350 and which can climb even the most twisted coconut trees, is given together with a Scooty, mobile phone at a total cost of Rs 40000 for which a bank loan can be availed. Kudumbashree provides a subsidy of Rs 7500. The Panchayat also provides support for equipment purchase. Women from 90 Gram Panchayats took part in the training cum demonstration organized at the Mallapuram Municipal Compound. It takes two weeks of training and practice to master climbing trees with these equipment. The equipment is currently in use in Nedirippur- Harijan Colony, Chungattam and Edakari, where each person makes an average income of Rs 650 per day. Traditional climbers also find this equipment useful and found out that they don't suffer from chest pain while using it. The equipment also has a mechanism whereby it can be locked and the top of the tree cleaned effectively. Technically professional climbers can work upto 110 trees in five hours.

2. A WOMEN TURNS INTO A STORY MAKER

It's not often that an inborn talent becomes a business and a way of life. Ordinarily Jesse Thomas' talent would not have been noticed, but many people know her today because of her unique ' product'- books, which she writes and publishes. Not only does she write but also publishes, popularizes <https://assignbuster.com/female-empowerment-in-kerala/>

and builds a reader base for her books. Jesse Thomas is based in Thrissur. Her husband Thomas drives an autorickshaw, and she has two children-Justin and Tesse. Jesse started writing at the age of eleven. Her friends were her first readers and critics. She wrote about everyday life and things that she saw around her. With the encouragement of her teachers, her story was published in a magazine from Enrakulam, Pushparani ; when she was 13 years old. Thereafter six other stories were published, but her first book was published only in December 2008. For Jesse, who had to discontinue education after the 9th standard to care for her siblings, this is remarkable perseverance. The lack of formal education was not a deterrent to her urge to tell stories, and she kept writing. Her mother supported the family by selling vegetables after father left his wife and five children in a state of penury. Jesse married Thomas when she was twenty years. Thomas has been a source of strength and encouragement and has supported her efforts to write and publish. Jesse received support from the Thrissur Corporation under SJSRY with a loan of Rs 75000. With this she wrote and published the book “ Jeevanude Vilakku Enniki Kittum” (I will get the lamp of life). Though her popularity increased and the sales were reasonable she still has unsold books and a loan to repay. She however did not give up and continues to write and publish. Jesse is the President of the Namma Neighbourhood Group in the 25th ward of Thrissur Corporation. It's a common sight to see her books being displayed alongside pickles and dried products at the Kudumbashree monthly market. Jesse has learnt the challenges in publicity and sales through experience, but has the self -confidence to move forward. Her activity is unusual and is driven purely by her talent and enthusiasm, but with the right support, she could become a well known writer.

3. AN OFFERING OF TURMERIC IN HARIPADA

Cultivation of turmeric is not widespread in Kerala. Seasonal rainfall and open land without shade is needed for turmeric cultivation. Middlemen take most of the profits and procedures with meager returns. Sixty women from several neighbourhood groups in Haripada Gram Panchayat in Allapuzha district, decided to take up turmeric cultivation. Turmeric is an offering at the Mannarashala temple of serpent gods which has several women devotees. The turmeric production is a joint initiative of Kudumbashree and the Panchayat under the Samagra initiative. Of the 60 women from five Gram Panchayats involved in this activity, 30 are engaged in cultivation and 30 in production of seeds. Each day 50kg of turmeric is harvested and supplied to the temple through an agency. The market is assured and they are not exploited by middlemen. It is hoped that as they gain confidence, the women will directly take up marketing activities as well.

4. NEW WAYS TO ADDRESS MILK SCARCITY

Nature Fresh is a new initiative of Kudumbashree for production of marketing of milk. It has been initiated in Edavetti Grama Panchayat in Idukki District and Kannadi Grama Panchayat in Palakkad District. 55 Kudumbashree enterprises across 14 wards of Kannadi village are involved in this enterprise. 50 women with dairy units of two cows each are engaged in milk production and 5 women are involved in sale of milk. These enterprises have been established at a cost of Rs 35.5 lakhs wherein Rs 16 lakhs has been provided by Palakkad District Panchayat and Rs 19 lakhs as bank loan. The

integrated intervention addresses all stages of dairy management. Each dairy unit with two cows and calves has a shed of 430sq. ft. The floor is designed such that no dung or water stagnates, and is drained out effectively. The shed is well ventilated and easy to clean. There is also water storage facility in the shed. Each unit has an equipment box. All families are trained in scientific care of the animals. The milk is tested and must meet basic standards of 3.5% fat and lactometer reading of 28 for the milk to be accepted for marketing. The milk is bottled and sold to houses within an hour of milking. In Kerala which faces a scarcity of milk, the Nature Fresh experiment in Idukki district sets an example. Kudumbashree proposes to initiate the Nature Fresh initiative in two Gram Panchayats in all districts.

- GENDER SELF LEARNING PROGRAMME

Kudumbashree have been working on a programme that aims at getting women to discuss the gender dimension of their issues. For this they had to break the mould of thrift and credit based discussions which alone were taking place, apart from the odd health or other dissemination . Locally contextualised modules on issues such as women and work, women and health, women and mobility, women and entertainment are developed and deliberated in Neighbourhood Group meetings. The different voices of women and their perceptions about the topics of discussion are captured on a web-based portal accessible at the level of the Local Self Government. The portal is being developed with the support of the Minister of Information Technology, Government of India Awareness building programmes seem not to leave any sustained impact. It was felt therefore that a learning process in which the women felt themselves to have a stake, and would be delivered

not through trainings, but through discussions focusing on some aspect of their lives and livelihoods they could relate to, either through a story line, or through some other format- press cuttings, poems, skit etc. had to be the mode of delivery. State level consultations help identify the themes of the ' learning modules', The content for the learning modules are prepared by local women resource persons, who source the stories out of their own experiences for further contextualisation and development. Once the modules are developed, they are consolidated and disseminated by resource persons in the neighbourhood groups. Women are encouraged to ask questions about themes ranging from work and environment to health, power and power structure. Kudumbashree is actively involved in the myriad aspects of implementation of the programme, from job card registration through labour budgeting and work site facilitation to social audit. Moreover, it is the single rights based programme spearheaded by the state, which recognizes women's work participation concerns as a matter of rights and equity.

CONCLUSION : Today there is a great awakening among women. Given an opportunity, they will deliver the results. Empowerment of women is absolutely necessary in straightening her personality. The need of an hour is to provide an opportunity in a conducive atmosphere free from gender difference. The need for awareness motivation to be an active member of the society and courage the faults of male counterparts are great challenges today. The above paradigm is about inclusive growth through self-employment opportunities that every strata in our society can access

influencing a transformational change in delivering self-sustaining profitability.

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