

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KERALA THROUGH KUDUMBASHREE PROJECT.

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'The empowered women is powerful beyond measure and beautiful beyond description' - Dr. Steve Maraboli

Abstract

Women are at the heart of most societies. Regardless of whether they are working or not, mothers are very influential people in children's lives. Educating girls is one of the most important investments that any country can make in its own future. Educating a girl is one of the best investments her family, community, and country can make. We know that a good quality education can be life-changing for girls, boys, young women, and men, helping them develop to their full potential and putting them on a path for success in their life. India is famous as a great country of many cultures, traditions, religions and geographical characteristics. Traditionally, women have been compelled to play the second fiddle in every sphere, be it in family or public life. Such in order of things in India in spite of the fact that women nowadays, are no less proficient than men in any field. In the case Kerala women, the same as the above. But today, women are not what they used to be some years ago; they have now made their presence felt in every sphere of life. Women have ultimately discarded their homely image and are now making meaningful contribution to the progress of the nation. 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 peninsula, 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.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education has a profound effect on girls' and women's ability to claim other rights and achieve status in society, such as economic independence and political representation.. Globalization has presented new challenges in the realization of the goal of empowering women and now women empowerment has become the slogan and motto of many social reformers, governmental agencies and voluntary organizations. There is a long cherished wish among all the women to have better avenues in life in order to lead the life in a more fruitful way. However the concept women empowerment is a matter of controversy even now. Empowerment is a process of acquiring knowledge and awareness which enable them to move towards life with greater dignity and self assurance. In fact an empowered woman is a nation's strength. Women need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for the building up of the family, society and the nation.

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.

Overview

Empowerment has been considered an effective tool to bring about changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. A nation, society as well as the individual himself or herself, cannot progress adequately until the status of women in the region is improved, in the very least. Gandhi (1930) written about the role of women in society that "to call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuitionis she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"

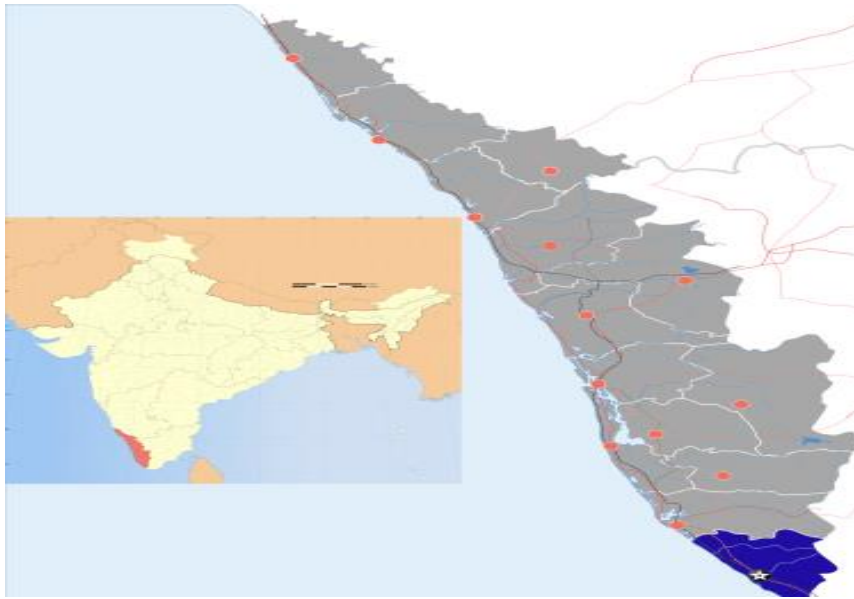
Kerala is witnessing a silent revolution, spawning womanpower, possibly restoring to the State its lost matriarchal legacy, where the women enjoyed pre-eminence, safety, security and respect, including self-respect. This female empowerment is taking place through the Kudumbashree movement, which has 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. 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.

STRUCTURE OF KUDUMBASHREE

Kudumbashree has three tiers community based organization (CBO) for its effective administration and decentralized operations. Neighborhood group (NHG) -This is the lowest tier consisting of 15 to 40 women members from poor families. Meetings are arranged on a weekly basis, in the house of one of the NHG members. The Area Development Society (ADS) is the second tier. ADS are formed at ward level- panchayat, municipality or a corporation by joining 10-15 NHGs. The Community Development Society (CDS) is the highest tier formed by union of all the ADSs in the respective panchayat, in 'rural' or municipality and in 'town' or corporation in city areas. It monitors the thrift and credit activities of NHGs at these levels ie. panchayat or municipality or corporation level.

Study Region

Trivandrum(Anglicised name), is located in the southern most district of Kerala State and is the capital city . The city has been referred as the "Evergreen city of India" by Mahatma Gandhi. It is situated between north latitudes 8° 17'and 8° 51' and east longitudes 76° 41' and 77° 17'. The city situated on the west coast of India is bounded by Lakshadweep island to its west and western Ghats to its east. The study was conducted among the Kudumbashree members of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation area in Kerala state only.



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To identify the major factors on the empowerment women
- To determine the Age, marital Status and education level of Kudumbshree members
- To measure the usefulness of Kudumbashree for women empowerment

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study is the Kudumbashree members of Thiruvananthapuram municipal corporation area. The field survey was carried out covering all areas of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation. The sample population includes those members who were active in the Kudumbshree group . A pre-tested structured questionnaire prepared in local language was used. The Kudumbshree members were individually met for collecting accurate data directly. A random sample of 250 members was selected for the study

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Age wise distribution of Kudumbashree members

Sl.no	Age groups	No.of respondents	Percentage of respondents
1.	18-23	8	3.2
2.	24-29	71	28.4
3.	30-35	79	31.6
4.	36-41	34	13.6
5.	42-47	25	10
6.	48-53	19	7.6
7.	54-59	10	4
8.	60 and above	4	1.6
	Total	250	100

The age wise distribution of women of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation area is as tabulated in table -1.

The table highlights that most of the members fell within the 30-35 age slab (31.6percentage).The second the highest no of respondents fell within 24-29 age slab (28.4percentage) and the rest 13.6 percentage of the total 250 respondents came under 36-41.

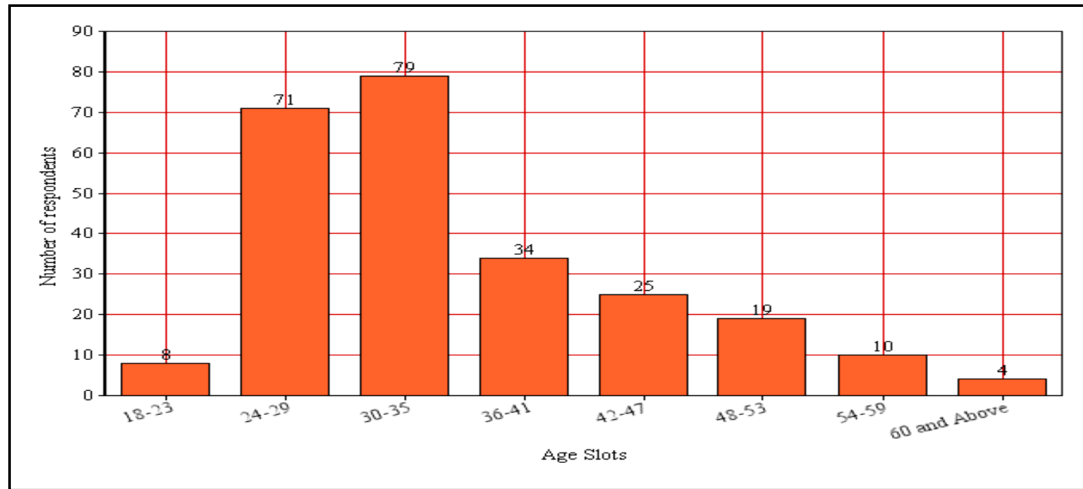


Figure 1: Age wise distribution of Kudumbshree Members

The Education level of the Kudumbshree members was compiled and tabulated as shown below:

Table 2: Education level of women

Sl.No	Education	Number of Respodents	Percentage of respodents
1.	Below SSLC	14	5.6
2.	SSLC	89	35.6
3.	Plus Two/Pre-degree	78	31.2
4.	Diploma	31	12.4
5.	Graduation	29	11.6
6.	Post Graduation	9	3.59
	Total	250	100

Education level of women tabulated in Table -2 shows that 35.6 % has passed the secondary school education and 31.2 has plus two/pre-degree, 12.4 % has diploma education which includes polytechnic and other technical job related diploma courses. While 11.6% has graduation, 3.59 % of the total 250 respondents are post graduates.

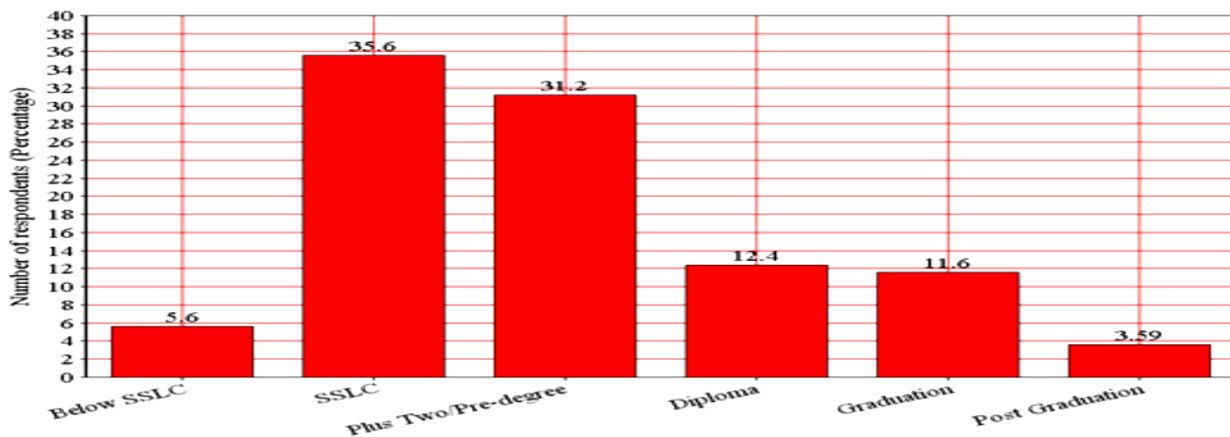


Figure 2- Education level of Women

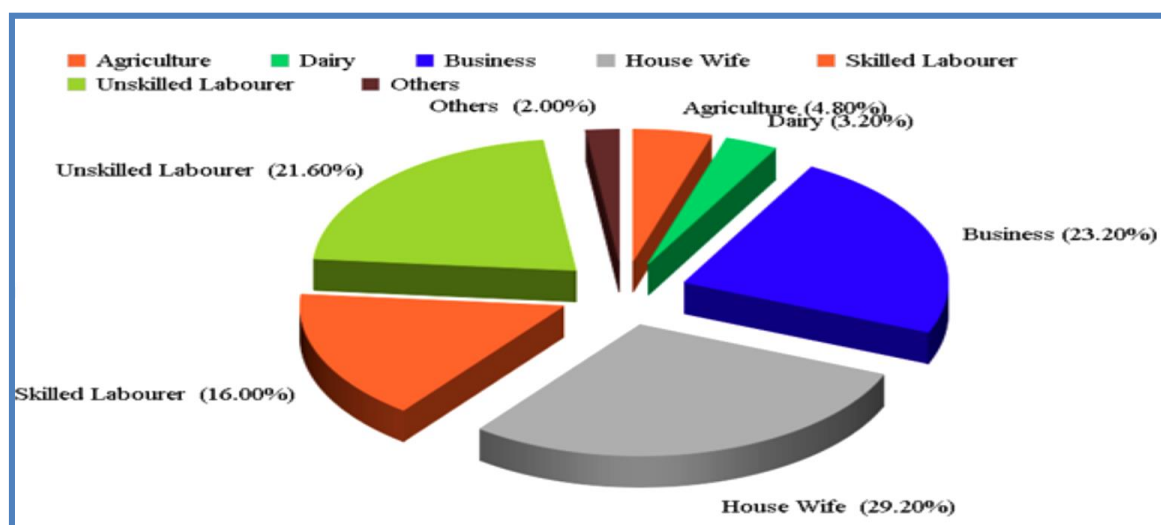
Table 3: Major factors for the empowerment of women as per respondents' views

Sl.No	Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Traning	20	8
2.	Entrepreneurship skill	12	4.8
3.	Funding	61	24.4
4.	Coordination	10	4
5.	Support from NGO	14	5.6
6.	Support from Govt.	60	24
7	Support from Family	73	29.2
	Total	250	100

Table-3reveals the most important factors for empowerment of women according to the respondents. 73 respondents out of 250 (29.2%) said that support from family is the most important factor. Besides this, funding and support from the government were considered the next most important factors (24.4 % and 24 % respectively). Kudumbshree members are engaged in various occupations for earning their livelihood.Information about the occupation of the Kudumbashree members under study was collected.They were reported as in Table-4 below:

Table 4:Occupation wise Distribution of Kudumbashree members

Sl.No	Occupation	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Agriculture	12	4.8
2.	Dairy	8	3.2
3.	Business	58	23.2
4.	Housewife	73	29.2
5.	Skilled laborer	54	21.6
6.	Others	5	2
	Total	250	100

**Figure-4 Occupationwise Distribution of Kudumbashree members**

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. Empowerment of women is a necessity for the sustainable development of a nation. 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. Kudumbashree project boosted the women empowering strategies adopted in Kerala state. Success of Kudumbashree is not only for individual benefits of woman but also their family, community etc. Kudumbashree has enhanced entrepreneurship and leadership, and the capacity of women to work and earn together. The status of women family has thus substantially improved. Empowering women and improving their social and economic status are essential ingredients for realizing the full potential of economic and political development of the entire society and it ensuring sustainable development.

Suggestions

- Awareness campaign, Workshops and seminars should be arranged at the village
- Continuous and rigorous leadership training required for individual and group members
- Support from family is the most important factor.
- Literature and publications are a major area through which the whole notion of women empowerment can be inculcated to the society.
- Arranging programmes for interaction with other empowered women in the society is another important way of motivating women.
- The institutions that are engaged in various fields of social work can start short term diploma or certificate courses in areas of rural development with special emphasis on projects for women's development.
- Government should make sure that each official body has sufficient number of women members.
- There should be an official body consisting of representatives of the government and voluntary association, which can function as a coordinating agency.
- Audio visual aids and programs like radio, television etc. will boost the women
- empowerment and development strategies.

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