
**A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF KUDUMBASREE UNITS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN
CHENDAMANGALAM GRAMA PANCHAYAT PARAVUR TALUK**

¹Lekshmy P.R. and²Dr.Sony Vijayan

(¹M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Commerce & Management, Amrita School of Arts & Sciences, AmritaVishwaVidyapeetham ,Brahmasthanam ,Edappally North PO, Kochi,India)

(²Associate Professor & H.O.D , Department of Commerce & Management, Amrita School of Arts & Sciences, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham ,Brahmasthanam, Edappally North PO, Kochi,India.)

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment can bring miracles for the development of the country. It is through them the development of families and nations take place. Any development without considering the role of women and their upliftment cannot be successful. Self-help units like Kudumbasree is established and promoted by the Government of Kerala as a part of its women empowerment policies could be seen in the light of the above view. This study focuses on the impact of Kudumbasree units on women empowerment in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat in Paravur Taluk. Variables used for study are personal skill, self-confidence, knowledge, and awareness. Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. For the purpose of the study 50 samples are selected. Major findings of the study reveals that acquisition of personal skills ,level of self-confidence, level of knowledge ,level of awareness of the women of Kudumbasree units in Chendamangalam is high. Empowerment doesn't vary with the religion, age, profession, monthly earnings of family of the respondent. But it varies with the level of knowledge among the respondents having different education level. Women in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat have certainly improved their social status after their joining Kudumbasree. They are not shy and not keeping away from programmes; instead they show their interest in participation and involvement in all programmes that are being conducted for their emancipation.

Keywords: *Economic growth, Equal Status, Development, Globalisation, Kudumbasree, Women Empowerment etc.*

INTRODUCTION

As a developing country India still faces major problems of unemployment and under employment. These both problems can be eliminated through creation of employment opportunities, entrepreneurial activities, providing educational facilities, etc. made by the countries. It is therefore necessary for the countries to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth –. Economic growth and development of a country depends upon its citizens. Food and shelter are the basic amenities needed by the mankind across the world. Several people in many countries are suffering due to non-availability of the basic needs in spite of the technological advancement both economic and technological – amongst them. Globalization and increased usage of communication technology have brought the countries nearer but the poverty lead problems still remain. The way out is “empowerment of women” and providing “equal status to men and women” in all fields. It is through the women, the development of families and nations take place. Any development without considering the role of women and their upliftment cannot be successful. In view of these reasons and the intervention of United Nations Organization on women related matters, establishment of Kudumbasree Units across Kerala become relevant. Kudumbasree is one of the programmes introduced by the Government of Kerala (GoK) in the year 1998 in association with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and with the cooperation of local self-governments. The main objectives are to alleviate poverty and to make women more empowered by giving more employment opportunities to them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

How good is the response to women participation in Kudumbasree units in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat and whether this participation makes any significant change in women empowerment is the major problem under investigation.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyse whether there is any significant change in empowerment of women in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat through Kudumbasree Units.
- To understand its contribution to gender equality.
- To identify the contribution made by Kudumbasree units in poverty eradication and rural development in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat.
- To verify whether the empowerment varies with the socio-economic and demographic characteristic of the respondent.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Hypothesis

H_0 = Kudumbasree units in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat makes no significant change in women empowerment.

H_1 = Kudumbasree units in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat makes significant change in women empowerment

Research Design: Design of the Research is descriptive in nature.

Sampling Technique: Simple Random Sampling is used.

Type of Universe: Finite

Sampling Unit: Sampling Units are the women members of 10 (ten) micro enterprise units spread out in different wards viz., Chendamangalam, Kizhakkumpuram, Kottayil Kovilakam, Thekkumpuram, Karimbadam, Manakkodam and Vadakkumpuram of Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat.

Size of the Sample: For the purpose of the study 50 samples are selected.

Data Collection: Both primary and secondary data was used for the study. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire and also personal discussions with the CDS personnel & M.E. unit members in CGP. Secondary data was collected from journals, books, magazines, websites, articles and annual reports of various institutions.

Data Analysis: Data collected was analysed by applying Percentage method, Standard Deviation, Mean, One Way Z-test and One Way ANOVA.

Variables used: are personal skill, self-confidence, knowledge, and awareness.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is mainly concentrated on impact of Kudumbasree units on women empowerment in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MD. AMINUR RAHMAN (2013)^[1] points out that, Empowerment is a process of positive change that improves women fallback position and bargaining power within a patriarchal structure, and identify different causal pathways of change; material, cognitive, perceptual and relational. In his opinion empowerment results in increased awareness, capacity building, and decision-making power.

MAROLIA SNEHA B (2013)^[2] points out that, the social position of women is strongly motivated by their economic position. Enactment of laws could not help acquire paternal property rights to women even now. She also points out the importance of educating the women.

DR. VENUGOPALAN K. (2014)^[3] in his study point out the benefits and awareness women Kudumbasree members acquire after joining in the Kudumbasree. Largest part of Kudumbasree members are women workers who are working on daily wages.

SANJAY KANTI DAS (2011)^[4] in his study reveals that empowerment of tribal women flock is critical for their welfare and also for the development of the country. Empowerment should be such that it strengthens the mind of individual both internally and externally.

DR. P. VASANTHAKUMARI (2011)^[5] says in her study that empowerment is a process that addresses all resources and forms of power. The method if implemented on an individual basis cannot defeat helplessness of women. On the other hand if it is done on a joint basis or collectively it can surely make miracles in women empowerment.

MATHA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI^[6] a living legend of our time and known as "Amma" to her followers in the whole world wants to see the women and men progress together like the two wings of a bird recognising each other with equal value. Many of her devotees & followers worldwide have been conducting several programmes aimed at women empowerment and in realizing her dream.

WOMEN IN ANCIENT INDIA

It is believed that women played a significant role in Vedic times in India. Women were free to move along with their husbands after their marriage. They were free to select their husbands. Their role in managing the affairs of the family was at its peak in those days. Subsequently during the period of Codification of rules & regulations, their role was ignored. Sati and the practice of child marriage was the end results. In some parts of the country practice of Devadasi system flourished. The entry of Moguls further deteriorated the situation. The invasion and subsequent occupation of Indian territories by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French & the British could not help improve the situation of women. With the continued efforts and pressure from reformists like Rajaram Mohan Roy, practice of "Sati" and child marriages were abolished. India became independent in 1947. Sixty eight years after independence, India is still discussing about the women empowerment and the ways through which it can be achieved.

WOMEN IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES – A PERSPECTIVE VIEW

The situation of women in our neighbouring countries are much different from that of ours. Differences exist within the religious groups of each country and the method of struggles and strategies adopted by them in matters concerned with women. While some of these groups have accepted more violent and harsh methods like terrorist attacks on innocent people and government establishments, some trigger to use such other methods in attaining their goals. The general outcome remains as "sufferings of the innocents".

Afghanistan-Violent clashes between the ethnic groups resulted the entry of Russians and after their withdrawal the United States. The rise of Taliban and the war between many Islamic groups have damaged the women position.

Pakistan- Prior to the partition of India into Pakistan and East Pakistan in the year 1947 by the British, there were many disparities between men and women in social and political segments and these disparities still exist. For this, Heads of Religions and religious sects played a significant role in the male dominated society. With no educational facilities and poverty, the women in Pakistan are trying hard and struggle for their life. Women are taught to keep "quiet" from infancy itself and follow their parent's advice in all matters relating to them. Their decisions on matters have a binding effect on women.

Bangladesh- Liberated from the clutches of the West Pakistan administration in 1971 Bangladesh is still lingering in poverty. Gender based inequality persists and women are discriminated on many matters – education, health, politics, etc. Involvement of Bangladesh Gramin Bank in the agricultural sector of Bangladesh and formation of SHGs are helping the Bangladeshi women to come forward and assert themselves.

Nepal- The landlocked country located in the Himalayan terrains and between China and India, Nepal was known as the only Hindu Kingdom in the world until recently. Nepali women face poverty, illiteracy, ill health, gender bias, caste discrimination, etc.

Bhutan-Known as a Buddhist Kingdom Bhutan shares its border with India and Tibet. Women have property rights in Bhutan.^[7] However, Bhutanese women could not pledge their properties with the financial institutions there and obtain economic benefits. They cannot leave the property and venture into other places for work. Thus they are dependent on men for many of their needs. Several problems

of women exploitation and abuse exist in Bhutan. UN lead organizations are actively involved in bringing developmental work in Bhutan and the situation is changing.

Tibet-On 12th March 1959, the Chinese invaded Tibet and bombed its capital – the city of Lhasa – shattering the peaceful life of Tibetans and forcing them out to their country. The Chinese invasion prompted the formation of Association of Tibetan Women (TWA). Tibetan women and children had suffered a lot in the hands of Chinese military personnel which also evoked international protests then. TWA carry out several programmes – Empowerment through Action – for the benefit of its exiled society.

Myanmar- Formerly known as Burma, it was under the British rule. Myanmar became an independent nation on 4th January 1948. Under the colonial and military rule, people of Myanmar had experienced a lot of hardships. Even women and children were not spared by these regimes. Human rights violations were daily happenings. Gender inequalities and child abuses continue even today. International community and U.N. protests could not make any impact on the military rulers.

WOMEN IN AFRICA & OTHER COUNTRIES

While we in India are struggling for empowerment of women, reports from African countries in this matter are really amazing. Rwanda, a small African nation has passed certain laws against those committing violence against women. The high number of women in Rwanda's parliament in 2011 made it possible.^[8] African countries like Rwanda and Tanzania have made it a constitutional requirement for the government to include a certain number of women in their parliaments. There are significant changes in many African countries the result of which can be seen by many women taking up government jobs and involve themselves in politics. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the 1st woman to be President of Liberia. She is also the winner of Nobel peace prize for 2011. The award committee had praised her efforts in promoting peace, social justice and strengthening of women position in the society. In 2012, Joyce Banda became Malawi's first female President. Reports from the African sub-continent show that the women are changing. They are able to choose their own course of life. They venture into successful businesses alongside nurturing a family. It is also to be remembered that many of the African countries were under colonial rule and Africans were traded as "slaves" (both men and women) into Europe and some Western countries. This colonial rule has changed the culture, language and their religions too. The year 1919 witnessed the entry of Nancy Aster as the first woman in British parliament. Britain now have 148 woman members. The situation is almost same in the countries of European Union. Vatican City, said to be the capital of Roman Catholics, remains the only country which deny voting rights to woman. Women are being allowed to take part in elections in many gulf countries paving the way for enhancing their capabilities in government. In 2005, Kuwait became the 1st Gulf country to allow voting rights to women. Dr. Masouma al-Mubarak, activist on women rights and a Political Science teacher, became Kuwait's first female cabinet minister.

WOMEN PLIGHT IN INDIA**War among Nations – Sufferings by Women & Children**

The sufferings of men and women in wars are equal. Wherever wars have taken place, peace and harmony cannot be established. Even if peace treaties are made, political and other skirmishes/violence take place between sects of people. In all such clashes and wars women are targeted and brutally exploited by men. The law enforcing agencies also join in committing such atrocities on women. India is not excluded in this matter.

Crimes against Women in Kerala

In a report published by the Kerala Police' crimes against woman come under different heads: Rape, Molestation, Kidnapping, Eve-teasing, Dowry Deaths, Cruelty by husband/relatives and such other offences. Many of these crimes are going unreported and if reported too, the culprits get away with the help of their money power and influence. ^[9]There were 12,383 reported cases in 2015 as against 10,781 in 2010 under the above heads in Kerala. In the introductory chapter of a studyreport by Dr. L. Tharabhai^[10]says thatwomen are more likely to be victimized than men as they have a secondary position in society and list out various reasons and suggestions to resolve and bring down the crimes on women and girl children.

Falling Sex Ratios & Killing of Female Foeticide

The difference in sex ratios in our rural and urban population is also a matter of grave concern now. Vast differences exist in child sex ratios on an all India levels and State levels. Falling child sex ratios have a direct link to the killing of female foeticide by the parents in India. It is believed that some private nursing homes and hospitals carry out this crime with the help of medical practitioners for their greed of money.

Abuse of School/College Children – A Real Concern & Threat to Families and the Nation

School/College Children are also subjected to various kinds of exploitation and abuse due to which their career in life is destroyed. Many antisocial elements make use of women and girl children and they enter into school/college premises under some pretext or other and establish relationships with the students. Increased use of mobiles and internet also harm these students.

Failure of Government in Providing Basic Amenities to the People

In independent India, the people's hopes and aspirations were high. However, this could not be met by the governments at the centre and states. This has resulted the birth of Sarvodaya Movement and several political parties in India and land reforms. The power hungry politicians and business magnets of India wanted development of cities and they pay no little attention to the villages and the people who live there. In the name of development, they evict the people without providing proper resettlement and compensation. Government should, therefore, ensure timely resettlement and compensation to all those people who are being affected by development projects.

Role of Judiciary & the Government in Protecting the Rights of Women

The constitution provides equal rights to women in all matters in India. Both the government and the judiciary on their part had an important role to play in ensuring these rights to women. A number of laws were promulgated by the Government in relation to women. Among them, the following laws are considered to be prominent.

- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986)
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988)
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013

We in India every day hear about crimes committed on women. Only the crimes which are directed specifically against women are characterized as “crime against women”. These are mainly classified in two categories viz. the crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the crimes under the Special & Local Laws (SLL). The Supreme Court had given some major verdicts in cases involving women in India. Judgments in these cases are considered as “landmark” as it gave a new direction to law enforcing agencies in India and the people concerned. Following are the cases:-

1. Tuka Ram And Anr vs State Of Maharashtra, 1979 AIR 185, 1979SCR (1) 810

A tribal girl named Mathura was allegedly raped while in custody by two policemen. The accused were acquitted by the Court. Widespread protests subsequent to the court verdict, led to the promulgation of The Criminal Law (2nd Amendment) Act 1983 (No.46).

2. Air India Vs Nargesh Meerza, [(1981) 4 SCC 335]

A case of women’s right to equality. Supreme Court verdict in this case was against the Air India management. Court struck down the clause of retirement of air hostesses on attaining 35 years of age or on marriage within first 4 year of service or on first pregnancy as being arbitrary and unreasonable and violated Article 14 of Indian Constitution.

3. Mohammad Ahmed Khan Vs Shah Bano Begum, 1985 AIR 945, 1985 SCR (3) 844

Though the Court approved the right of Muslim women to get maintenance from her husband under section 125, subsequent events in the country forced the government to take a different view. Thus a new act, Muslim Women (Right to Protection on Divorce) Act, 1986 came into existence and curtailed the right of a Muslim women for maintenance.

4. Mackinnon Mackenzie Vs Audrey D’costa, 1987 AIR 1281

In this case Audrey a lady stenographer sued her employer under equal remuneration act as she was paid less than the male stenographer. The case was considered under Equal Remuneration Act and judgment delivered.

5. Sarla Mudgal Vs Union of India 1995, AIR 1531, 1995 SCC (3) 635

In this case, Supreme Court directed the Union Government to implement uniform civil code. The case was that a Hindu male, married under the Hindu law, desirous of taking on a second wife, converted to Islam. After the second marriage he reverted to Hinduism. Second wife pleaded that she had no protection under either of the personal law. This case proved how unscrupulous people can make use of personal laws existing in the country for their own benefits and leave the women thereafter.

6. Vishaka Sawhney Vs State of Rajasthan, AIR 1997 SC 3011, (1998)

This case dealt with sexual harassment of women at the work place. The court took a view that the sexual harassment at work place is violative of Article 15 and 21 of the Constitution and laid down exhaustive guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of working women in places of their work until a law is passed. Thus came The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

Role of United Nations Organization (U.N.O.) on Women Upliftment

As an international body of nations across the world, the U.N.O. has assumed a greater and important role in improving the conditions of women in their member states. Since the year 1975, 8th March is being celebrated as International Women Day (IWD) throughout the world. Review of progress so far made on protecting women rights and involvement in socio-political and economic fields are done by countries world over. Development programmes undertaken by the U.N. led organisations in many countries included raising the status of women in the society. Alarmed by the overall situation of the women in these countries, the U.N. continued its efforts and formation of the UN Women, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals can be seen in this respect. Pursuant to the deliberations made by the U.N., the Government of India had in the year 2010 set up the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW).

Development of Women in India's Five Year Plans

A special focus to the welfare of women was adopted with the launching of the first five year plan in 1951. Education, Social welfare and Health care facilities were the three major areas the 1st Planning Commission gave priority in relation to women. More emphasis was given on women centred programmes in the subsequent plans. Government of India headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had replaced the Planning Commission with NITI Ayog. Formation of NITI Ayog has brought out many women and children specific programmes in the 12th plan and these are being implemented at State and Central levels.

Social Justice Department of Kerala

In the year 1975 Government of Kerala established Social Justice Department. Many welfare programmes are being undertaken and carried out by this department for destitute women & children, adolescent girls, differently abled and mentally challenged, orphans, and poor aged people. The Social Justice Directorate is acting as the Nodal Agency for various welfare schemes of Government of India and the State Government.

Janamaithri Suraksha Project - Kerala

Government of Kerala's Janamaithri Suraksha Project launched in the year 2008 is expected to bring down many of the crimes. Police authorities have also sought peoples' participation in containing the crimes. Formation of vigilance committees by residents in many areas where antisocial elements are on work have brought down crimes like robberies, chain snatching, pick pocketing etc. to a certain level. Crimes on women and girl children however continue unabated.

Rehabilitation of Victims – Violence against Women in Kerala

The increased rate of violence against women and girl children in Kerala have forced the Government to think about rehabilitation programmes and other welfare measures to the affected women and their

families. Establishment of “Bhoomika” in the year 2010 and “Nirbhaya” Shelter Homes in the year 2013 by the Government could be seen in this respect. Government has also decided to set up fast track courts to take up trials in cases of violence against women. Government of Kerala had very recently introduced a “Lottery” meant exclusively to help for Women Empowerment programmes in the State. The income generated from this lottery will be used for Women education, Pension schemes for Widows, Women marriage and rehabilitation purposes.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations’ (NGOs) for Rehabilitation of Destitute Women & Children

Besides the government run institutions named above, there exists numerous other institutions (orphanages, abhaya bhavans for women & children etc.) run by several religious organizations and NGOs in Kerala. They play an important role in rehabilitating the orphans and destitute women. Financial aid from Central & State Governments and other foreign countries help establishment of these privately owned establishments. N.G.O.’s like Janaseva Sisu Bhavan in Ernakulam District working for saving the street children have come-up with a new scheme on women security, named as “Janaseva Sthree Reksha Samithi”.

Hurdles in Women Empowerment in India – Absence of Uniform Civil code

Poverty, mal nutrition, gender bias on various matters (pay scales for equal work, property rights, business ventures, politics, participation in social & economic works, etc.) are hindering the women to come up in their life. The evils of dowry, child marriage, kidnapping, prostitution, begging, chain snatching, pick pocketing are thriving though there are laws to prevent them. The policies adopted by the British in India concentrated divisions among India’s vast and different populations so that they can continue their rule. They found their success in that policy - Divide and Rule. The end result was bifurcation of India into two separate entities. While India remained “secular” and accepted all religious people, India could not formulate and implement a uniform civil code under pressure from different religions existing in the country. It is very sad and unfortunate that the Courts of India could not intervene in grievances of people and leaving their authority to religious heads/machinery in cases like Shab Bano. Acceptance of a uniform civil code remains a distant reality in India and this also poses a threat to India’s progress and women empowerment programmes.

FINDINGS

- Acquisition of personal skills, Level of self-confidence, Level of knowledge, Level of Awareness of the women of Kudumbasree units in Chendamangalam is high.
- There is no significant difference exist between the mean score of acquisition of personal skills, level of self-confidence, level of knowledge and level of awareness with respect to religion, age, monthly income of the family, profession of the respondent. So, it was concluded that empowerment doesn’t vary with the religion, age, monthly income of the family, profession of the respondent. But it varies with the level of knowledge among the respondents having different education level.
- Kudumbasree has attained women empowerment in Chendamangalam Grama Panchayat to a greater extent. 50% of the ward members are women. The Welfare Standing Committee of CGP consists only of women while in all the other standing committees woman have adequate representation. It ensures gender equality.
- The number NHGs and Micro Enterprise units spread across the 18 (eighteen) wards have brought prosperity to the families belonging to these units and thereby the society as a whole. Empowerment of women through income generating activities have made it possible.

SUGGESTIONS

- Kudumbasree should allow participation of all service minded highly educated and qualified people in all its projects. A data bank of all such personnel be maintained and their services made available to Kudumbasree units. This would be possible as the unemployed educated and technically qualified youth are available in plenty in Kerala. Help of government owned employment exchanges can be sought for this purpose.
- It is noticed that many of the Kudumbasree activities are funded by several government agencies both state and central. Delays in allowing the funds should be avoided as far as possible. Utilization of these funds need to be assured within a specified time as per the approved plans & estimates. Co-operation & co-ordination of all the government agencies with the financial institutions should ensure this at all levels.
- State Departments like Fisheries, Health & Family Welfare, Police and various Boards like Coconut Development Board, Coir Board, Spices Board, etc. have their own schemes aimed at Women. Linking their schemes to Kudumbasree, wherever possible, would be of beneficial to Kudumbasree.
- How the funds that are allocated to units are utilized need to be ascertained by a Vigilance Committee at all levels and instructions/guidelines be given for correction wherever necessary. This committee should have experts – qualified and well experienced – as Advisors. The tendency to write off the loans advanced by the banks under pressure from political parties need to be stopped.

CONCLUSION

The associated benefits after joining Kudumbasree had encouraged women to stay together and redressal of their grievances. It had brought out a new lease of life to their dreams and by which they have got a new status in the society, enhanced their knowledge and awareness on many matters and well-being of their families. By joining in NHGs and working in Micro Enterprises /Joint Liability Groups they have also acquired new skills and additional income which ultimately raised their standard of living and gave a new hope in themselves. This new hope is the feeling that they are equal to men in running the home affairs and for which they need not be “stationed” at home at all times and are able administrators in and outside their homes too. “If given an opportunity, everything is within their reach” is the message Kudumbasree gives us. This opportunity was given to them and government support ensured their success. Empowerment through employment or income generating activities of Kudumbasree women members have greatly helped in eradicating the poverty and advancing the development of rural areas greatly.

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