

Cultural Constraints and Empowerment: A Study of Kudumbashree in Kerala

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of*

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in
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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I, Gloria M.Babu hereby declare that the dissertation, titled Cultural Constraints and empowerment: A study of Kudumbashree in Kerala is a record of original research work undertaken by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology. I have completed this study under the supervision of Dr. Rajeev. K, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology.

I also declare that this dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

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This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment occupies the centre of discussions of social development and is carried by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). It continues to be highly debated and contested. Different scholars have defined empowerment in a different ways depending upon the contextual variations. The study seeks to present varied theoretical perspectives on empowerment and reinforce them with current empowerment practices in Indian settings. Based on relevant literature on empowerment, an attempt has been made here to examine the definitions and its cultural and contextual variations. This provides a linkage between theory and practice of empowerment in Indian society. An ethnographic study of Kudumbashree, a women organization in Kerala is been carried out where the contextual variations of empowerment is covered. Women empowerment has multiple implications for patriarchal surroundings and has possessed problems in re-engaging with structural inequalities like caste and class identities of women. All these create a plethora of problems to Indian society and empowerment among women helps in solving and eradicating such problems. Hence the study attempts to find out how Kudumbashree negotiates the contextual and structural issues of women empowerment. The problems faced by women tend to increase day by day and studying topics likes these helps in minimizing it thereby providing a better understanding about the concept of women empowerment. The researcher concludes the study by mentioning the contextual and dynamic variations of empowerment. There is no universally accepted definition for empowerment where it varies according to the subjective locations of individuals. For instance; empowerment for a woman in a scheduled caste or lower caste women varies to that of upper caste women.

Keywords: *Kudumbashree, Empowerment, Patriarchy, Decision- Making, Caste.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Empowerment is related to the beliefs, norms and values of every society; therefore, empowerment can be revealed differently in different societies. The concept of empowerment varies according to different cultural setting. It includes a situation where one can attain control of one's own life socially, economically, politically and culturally. All these types of empowerment have different meaning. Economic empowerment is explained by several scholars where they don't consider the political and social aspect of it. There is no universally accepted definition given to the concept of empowerment. "Women empowerment includes giving equal opportunities in all spheres of life" (Committee, 2011). In reality women are subjected to problems which mainly include domestic violence, sexual harassments, trafficking, rape etc. (Sharma, 2015, pp. 131–139). In a similar manner, empowerment for a women in a scheduled tribe or caste or women from a poor economic background varies from women of upward class. Hence the conceptualization of empowerment varies. The study focuses on how empowerment varies across context and circumstances. The study was conducted in Annamanda Panchayath, where the entire interview and conversation was scheduled to be in the mother dialect. The similar word for the use of women empowerment in Malayalam language is '*Sthree sakhigaranam*'. The term got its recognition in the year 2000. It is still not used frequently because of lack of awareness and vacant of the word. It was through Kudumbashree, an organization in Kerala working with the main objective of poverty eradication and women empowerment, the concept came into picture. It made awareness about the term to rural women. The dynamics and complication faced by the researcher while using the term is discussed in detail in the next chapters.

Caste and class-based discrimination is another major problem prevailing in the society which remains a major challenge in the process of empowerment. "It affects the society by making the people more exposed to prejudice, stereotyping and other things" (Singh, 2012). All religious groups in India, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrians, Buddhist or Jain, carry some memento of the caste system in them. Caste and Casteism have been carried to each and every corner of the globe to which the Indian Diaspora has shifted.

As mentioned by the scholar Upadhyay (2012) that, women from lower class always fail to get proper educational services, health conditions, lack of decision power etc. (Haddad, 1995), (Upadhyay, 2012, pp. 1-10). Caste disparities still prevail in India though there are significant growths in the economic status. As result problems faced due to caste increases day by day. India is a country where the constitution guaranteed equality, and all citizens are supposed to be treated equally irrespective of caste, creed, gender, class and sex.

Patriarchy can be considered as another in the process of empowerment. It always contests patriarchy. "Society, in particular, is a patriarchal society, which is subjugated by men which results in gender inequality" (Sultana, pp. 1-18). Patriarchal norms strongly prevail in the society which affects women majorly. As it is understandable that empowerment should begin from the doorstep, where women get the control to make a decision in her life, without any fear or barriers. In reality, women always fail to take a decision because of the stereotype of male supremacy prevailing in our society. The same was noticed in the fieldwork were in a few instances, women were observed to be the strong decision-making person where they fail to accept it because of the patriarchal norms. As mentioned earlier, India being patriarchal society, women are subjugated to many problems by stating the same. It, in fact, challenges patriarchy and is a major issue in the context of women empowerment. Role in decision making is still compromised considerably. Problems faced by women can be reduced if problems like caste, class, patriarchy, decision making are considered.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The meaning of empowerment varies according to different cultural contexts where this study attempts to address how is it relative, how it has undergone changes and its relevance. Many studies have been conducted on women empowerment and lots of problems have been figured. Men's control over women has taken a major position and results in many problems. (Duru, 2011, p. 6)

As mentioned, empowerment can take place socially, economically, politically and culturally. All these types of empowerment communicated different meaning depending upon their contexts. There is no universally accepted definition given to the concept of empowerment as it varies upon contexts, scholar and disciplines. This study, therefore, focuses on the dynamics and specificities of empowerment. Thus, empowerment is looked upon this thesis as embedded

on believes, norms and values of every society. This leads to a differential understanding of empowerment in different societies, regions, geographic locations etc. It can also vary according to different cultural settings. For instance, empowerment for women in a scheduled tribe or caste or women from poor economic background varies from a woman of upward class.

By improving the status of “Shree” of the family, the organization called Kudumbashree has worked for women empowerment. It always tries to maintain equality among its members. Patriarchy society always remains a challenge to women empowerment and rests as a major problem in the process of empowerment. “They are forced to cover up, as opposed to the opposite?” (Economist, 2010). Empowerment is the process which should begin at the doorstep and the situations like this make women more vulnerable. The study thereby focuses upon how empowerment contests patriarchy through reconfiguration of the decision-making process.

The study also explores the criticism against Kudumbashree in academics. There were few authors who explain about Kudumbashree in the context of discrimination and the existence of structural inequalities like caste and class. They say: “The women empowerment has achieved only a limited extent by Kudumbasree members and also the existence caste-based discrimination and social exclusion prevails among its members” (Dr.K.Venugopalan, 2014, pp. 35-44), (Shihabudheen, 2013, pp. 9-21). Hence this study also tries to figure out the existence of such structural inequalities inside the organization.

According to the census of 2011, Kerala is the only state in India where women outnumber men in terms of population. Thrissur is considered as the place where female populations are high when compared to male. The literacy rate is high too. But the problems faced by women still exist (Khader, 2017, pp. 85-92). As a result, the government started implementing programs for their welfare. The evolvement of projects like Kudumbashree helps in improving the situation of women in society. Kudumbashree is a successful program launched by the government of Kerala for poverty eradication and women empowerment. Thrissur is considered a place where not much development is seen when compared to other districts like Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam, Ernakulam etc. as per the status of Kudumbashree. Studies conducted in the place are also very few. Conducting a study here would benefit the researcher in getting suitable samples which is appropriate for the research study.

Research Questions

- Empowerment does not entail a singular meaning. Different scholars across disciplines have defined it in ways that are different from each other. An economic form of empowerment doesn't explain the social and political aspect of empowerment. This study explains how the meaning of empowerment vary according to different contexts, both space and time.
- How empowerment deals with the question of structural inequalities. Does empowerment enable women to renegotiate with identity location like those governed by caste, class and gender?
- How women empowerment contests patriarchy through reconfiguration of the decision-making process? Does it necessarily challenge patriarchy?
- How a woman is empowered after her involvement to Kudumbashree. Does it have an impact on her entire life circle, both in Public and Private Space?

1.2 Significance of the study

Women in general infrequently enjoy the wide spectrum of freedom and rights granted by the constitution and other legal provisions. In a male-dominated society, they face a plethora of problems in the form of discrimination, sexual harassment, exploitation, violence and the like in every sphere of life with different intensities. All these drawbacks the process of empowerment. Studying the topic will help us know more about the difficulties and how Kudumbashree plays a role in overcoming it. Apart from contextual variations, the study also includes the existence of structural variations like caste, class and patriarchy on the basis of Kudumbashree experiences. Women empowerment is a much-debated topic in 21st century and would enable in knowing more about the marginalized community. It is a topic which needs to be studied in the present society where the problems faced by women tend to increase day by day. Realizing all kind of discrimination prevailing in the society will allow minimizing it. It would benefit the society to have a clear understanding about the concept of women empowerment. The journey of tracing the economic development to the cultural development of marginalized community can be studied through an ethnographic study. It creates an interpretive framework through which it is better to understand the internal (emotions) and external (contextual) factors which affect

behaviour. Under informal interviews, respondents are in a relaxed mood and interviewer can clearly understand experiences and clarify the effect of environmental factors (Michalko, 1980).

1.3 Objectives

- To study how empowerment varies with regard to context.
- To examine how women empowerment further negotiates with structural inequalities like caste and class, deeply embedded in the local social frameworks, in the context of the specific experience of Kudumbashree.
- To analyze whether women empowerment actually results in a re-engagement with patriarchy in the context of Kudumbashree.

1.4 Research methodology

1.4.1 Study area

The research focuses on women working in Kudumbashree in Annamanada Panchayath of Thrissur district. Researcher mainly focuses on women having 4-5 years of experience.

1.4.2 Tools of data collection

Primary data refers to the researcher directly going to the field and collecting information from the respondents. This mainly includes In-depth interview, Participant observation, Field Visit. Secondary data collected from journals and publications, books, relevant website etc.

1.4.3 Methods of data analysis

The field and fieldworker

Ethnography is often considered the qualitative method par excellence involving the dynamics of the relation between fieldworker and his field. An ethnographer assumes that people know the best about their culture and the aspects of their lives and learning from them is the best way of drawing information and generating knowledge about their lives. (Michalko, 1980), (Ethnography; report summarizes ethnography study findings from university of Cincinnati (representing the language of the 'other': African American vernacular English in ethnography)., 2014), (Donham, 2018, pp. 18-27), (Wardle, 2011, pp. 117-127).

Ethnography is used as a tool for data collection. It includes fieldwork where researcher directly goes to the field and being one among them. Researcher analyses each and every behaviour of the participant. Researcher prefers women having at least 3 years of experience in the Unit.

1.5 Introducing the area of the study

The study is conducted in Kudumbashree, an organization in Kerala working with the main objective of poverty eradication and women empowerment. The organization involves a holistic approach to empowering women socially, economically, politically and culturally.

1.5.1 Role of SHG in the empowerment of women

“Self Help Group usually refers to small groups of persons with common problems who work together to achieve specific behavioural, attitudinal or cognitive goals” (Jerttson, 1975, pp. 144-145). They work with the instigation of working women to come up in life. This can play a major role in eradicating poverty in the country. Micro Finance system always engages with Self Help groups to make an economic aid which helps in removing patriarchal obsessions and enjoying freedom. And hence “It has proved they can bring about personal and institutional change in women” (Vattano, 1972, pp. 7-15). In addition to this, all the self-help group majorly involves into to the economic empowerment of women (Srimathi, 2012). Thus, they overcame economic poverty as well as other social and gender issues. It helped in increasing the level of leadership and organizational skills, management of various activities of a business, right from acquiring finance, identifying raw material, market and sustainable diversification and modernization.

Self Help Groups of women in India have been accepted as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural areas. It always helps in bringing them up collectively from all spheres of life to fight for their own rights and polices. It has been accepted across world as the best way to tackle poverty and to enable the community in improving their quality of life through social mobilization of poor, especially women, into Self Help Groups. (UNDP India).

Self Help Groups like SEWA, Kudumbashree, Navjyoti Indian Foundation etc... are the famous organizations which are working for women empowerment. They make women fit for

entrepreneurship, community leadership and social coalitions which benefit her future and well-being.

1.5.2 Statistics of SHGS in India

In India, till 31 March 2018, the total number of saving linked SHG's includes 8744437 with the maximum number of 1047103 in Tamil Nadu and minimum of 43 SHG's in Daman and Diu (Indiastat: Revealing India Statistically)

1.6 Kudumbashree

All the Self-Help Groups and Non-Government organizations enable in the empowerment of women economically. Kudumbashree follows a holistic approach of empowering women socially, economically, culturally and politically. Gaining all these values helps considerably in improving women's status in the society which makes them empowered. Microfinance programmes have increasingly promoted country's positive economic impact and also provided the belief that, they empower women. Kudumbashree is an initiative by the Kerala State Government that works with the objective of Poverty Eradication and Women Empowerment. The mission aims to eradicate absolute poverty within the framework of 10 years. The name Kudumbashree in the Malayalam language means "Prosperity of Family". The program focuses upon the strong platform of the "Shree" of the family, i.e.; the women. It was officially inaugurated by the Prime Minister Atla Bihari Vajpayee in 1988. The mission follows a process approach rather than a project approach by involving women to all the sectors which helps in their upliftment. The mission has adopted different methodology in addressing the poor through community-based organizations. (Kudumbashree, 2018), (Johnkutty, 2012).

1.6.1 History and evolution of Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree, a women-oriented community-based poverty alleviation programme is an attempt to mitigate the development imbalance of the state. For the first time in the history of local self-government, these bodies were asked to set apart 10 per cent of the grant-in-aid for projects which directly benefit women. From the perspective of a government, Kudumbashree was the extension of the Community Development Societies (CDS) experiments in Alappuzha and Malappuram. At the same time, the CDS initiatives themselves had drawn lessons and

strategies from the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) led initiative of SHG Bank Linkage Programme (Johnkutty, 2012).

The ‘Kudumbashree’ programme for poverty eradication is the social programme rendered during the 7th and 8th Five Year Plans for the development of slums in urban areas such as Urban Basic Services, Urban Basic Services for the Poor and Urban Poverty Alleviation. These programmes were successfully fulfilled in the selected areas through the three-tier organizational structure of the poor women of Alappuzha town and Malappuram district (Balakrishanan, 2011), (Gervis, 2018).

The projects like IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) launched by the GOI (Government of India) in the 1980s failed due to a multitude of reasons like lack of choice by the beneficiaries over the purpose and amount of credit, lack of participation by them etc. It was at that time NABARD took an initiative of group lending by promoting self-help groups during 1986-87. This was done with the help of Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA). This led to the launch of SHG – linked banking project in 1991. The present program Kudumbashree has been developed from a number of CBOs (Community Based Organization). In 1987 participatory developments programme .i.e. Urban Basic Service (UBS) was sponsored by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the GOI. This was a programme for those living in slums. Later this programme was expanded to USBP i.e; Urban Basic Service for the Poor (Balakrishanan, 2011).

➤ Alappuzha Community Based Nutrition Programme (CBNP)

In 1991, Alappuzha Municipal Urban Basic Service for the Poor (UBSP) inaugurated a Community Based Nutrition Programme (CBNP). The main objective of the project was to improve the nutritional status of the children of 0-15 age group and women of 15-45. Later a survey was conducted to discover the factors causing malnutrition. To identify the poor, nine risk factors were selected.

- Kutcha house
- No access to safe drinking water.
- No access to a sanitary latrine.
- Illiterate adult

- Not more than one earning family member.
- Family getting only two meals a day or less.
- Presence of children below age 5
- Alcoholic or drug addict.
- SC/ST family (Kudumbashree, 2018) (Johnkutty, 2012) (Balakrishanan, 2011).

If any four of the above risk factors are positive in the family, such family is treated as “risk family”. Families identified as poor were federated into NHGs. NHG consisted of 20-45 BPL families. NHGs were federated to ADSs and ADSs were federated to CDSs, at the municipal levels. Later the CDS system was extended to all 36 wards in Alappuzha Municipality. This urban model of CDS was again extended to the entire urban area of the state in December 1994. The Alappuzha CDS was awarded as the best model to be followed throughout the world for the poverty eradication activities. The model got international recognition by receiving “We the People Award” in 1995.

➤ Malappuram Model

Following the success of Alappuzha model, the participatory system of poverty was initiated in Malappuram district on 11th November 1994. The main objective of the programme is to reach out to the unreached. They mainly focus upon the fulfilment of basic needs such as drinking water, basic education, primary health care, food security and a safe environment.

The modified risk indicators include:

- Families with substandard houses and huts
- Families with no sanitary latrine
- Families having no safe drinking water supply within at least 300 meters.
- Families having more than six members
- Families with only one earning member
- Families belonging to SC/ST
- Families having illiterate members
- Families having only two meals or less a day

- Families having alcoholics, widows and divorcees (Kudumbashree, 2018) (Johnkutty, 2012) (Balakrishanan, 2011).

Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) awarded Malappuram experiment for its best practices in service to the public with Gold Medal Award.

Enthused by the phenomenal success of Alappuzha and the Malappuram model of the participatory development, implemented with the active involvement of the stakeholders, the State Government of Kerala resolved to extend the participatory women based programme to the entire state of Kerala in 1988. The name adopted for the massive mission was Kudumbashree which means prosperity in the family. Hence, Kudumbashree is an idea that has evolved through community mobilization experiments in Alappuzha and Malappuram. These initiatives themselves were informed by the experiences of certain traditional community practices and organizations.

1.6.1 Organisational structure of Kudumbashree

The community structures by Kudumbashree at various levels include:

- Neighbourhood Groups :(KudumbasreeAyalkkoottam) comprising of 15-20 women members selected from poor families.
- Area Development Society :(Kudumbasree Ward Samithy) is formed at the ward level of local government by organizing 8-10 NHGs.
- Community Development Society :(Kudumbasree Panchayath Samithy) formed at the village panchayat level or at the municipality (town) or corporation (city) is a align of ADSs. (Kudumbashree, 2018)

The Kudumbashree network by 15th March 2017 had 2,77,175 NHGs affiliated to 19,854 ADSs and 1073 CDSs with a total membership of 43,06,976 women Kudumbashree membership is generally open to all adult women, limited to one membership per family (Kudumbashree, 2018).

The slogan of the mission is “Reaching out to families through women and reaching out to the community through the family” (Kudumbashree, 2018).

1.6.3 Objectives of Kudumbashree programme

The objectives of the Kudumbashree programme include:

- Identification of the poor families through risk indices-based surveys, with the active participation of the poor and the communities to which they belong.
- Empowering the poor women to improve the productivity and managerial capabilities of the community by organizing them into Community Based Organizations.
- Encouraging thrift and investment through credit by developing Community Development Societies to work as an informal bank of the poor.
- Improving incomes of the poor through improved skills and investment for self-employment.
- Ensuring better health and nutrition for all (Kudumbashree, 2018).

1.6.4 Programmes of Kudumbashree

Formation of Women Collectives: The poor women from families will be representing Neighbor Hood Groups (NHGs). The membership in the NHG includes 15-20. A five-member team elected from the NHGs will be leading the programme. It will be formed into Area Development Societies (ADS) which is at ward level and then into Community Development Societies (CDS) at the Panchayath level. The organizational structures will always provide opportunities for collective public action (Jomy, 2015, pp. 2394-3629).

NHG Meetings (Ayalkootam): Weekly based meetings are held in NHGs where discussions, sharing of experiences, organized /unorganized training etc, are done which will broaden their perspective on better health, better social status, better education and economic status. To improve economic and social development, suitable skill up gradation training will also be provided to women (Jomy, 2015, pp. 2394-3629) (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Thrift Credit Operations and 24-Hour Banking System: It is a banking system which will operate as 24- hour for the poor. Small savings collected in the families are pooled at various levels as thrift and used to attract credit from banks. The need found at NHG level is shaped as micro plans, which are integrated into mini plans at ADS level and action plan at CDS level. Kudumbashree advocates self-help approach for building latrines, houses, etc keeping the minimum support from the government. (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Balasabhas: It includes the grass root level groups of children of BPL families. Kudumbashree has its own classification of Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL). The mission aims at a holistic approach to wipe-out poverty. “Catch them young and nip poverty in the buds” is the guiding slogan behind the balasabha movement which was initiated by the mission. (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Kudumbashree is one among the successful program implemented by the government of Kerala. It is arguably one among the largest women’s network in the world. Though the program initiated for the central themes of poverty eradication and women empowerment, it also focuses on democratic leadership and support structures from the ‘Kudumbashree’ family. The speciality of the program is that it is linked to local self –government institutes (Kudumbashree, 2018).

1.6.5 Kudumbashree for women empowerment

Kudumbashree is one among the largest organization in the country working for women empowerment. Currently, 23% of women.i.e.; 43 lakhs of women in Kerala works under the umbrella of Kudumbashree (Kudumbashree, 2018). There is a drastic change in the life of women after their involvement into Kudumbashree which includes political, social and economic changes. It always enables in the upliftment of rural women (Krishanakumar, 2017, pp. 49-69), (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Major arbitration done by Kudumbashree in last 5 years includes:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS): This programme enables strengthening of ADS. ADS representatives were to be the ‘Mates’ for the scheme implementation. About two lakh women were trained to work as ‘Mates’ in MGNREGS. The main aim of the mission is to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of work. This started emerging as a cadre developing knowledge on identification and estimation of works, and in work supervision. MGNREGS and its link with collective farming lead to the transformation of the entire structure. This programme benefited ADS to a large extent.

2. Gender self-learning Programme: Kudumbashree initiated a special project called the Gender Self Learning Programme (GSLP) that directly leads to women’s empowerment. The programme mainly notices the necessity of understanding the importance of “self-learning” and

using it to take advantage of the innate potential of women which results in the upliftment of rural women. The GSLP reintegrates the concept of learning by positioning women in multiple roles such as participants, knowledge creators and information providers (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Women play a vital role in the provisions and development of society at large. With changing times, the status of women both in the oriental world as well as in the occidental world has changed. On account of traditional patriarchy which has been followed since time immemorial, habitually their contribution is not accounted for and even not valued. Along with equality and empowerment, today's woman has also to tackle new challenges. Unlike other poverty alleviation programmes, Kudumbashree has several strategies that empower women socially, economically and politically. Further, the three-tier federated community structure adds to its authenticity, accountability and commitment towards the poor and marginalized. Kudumbashree recognizes that capacitating women to understand and exercise their rights is a basic necessity for the success and sustainability of any poverty annihilation programme. Kudumbashree has enabled every poor woman in the state to the formation of NHGs and also enables them to address the issues of women by enhancing female work participation, participation in decision making, health and nutritional status, local governance and their role in planning, in addition, to make them as local entrepreneurs for finding their livelihoods. It always makes sure that woman tries to involve in some or other activities outside the home than sitting inside the four walls of the kitchen.

Kudumbashree also plays an active role in bringing women into local governance which results in the political empowerment of women. The participation of Kudumbashree members in Gram Sabhas and development works helps in providing them with a space for involvement into local governance. This will enable women in providing an opportunity to evolve as a community interface for local economic development lead by GPs in the areas of social infrastructure development, welfare programmes based on rights and entitlements, employment generation, from food security, health insurance, housing, enterprise development, MGNREGS and Jagratha Samiti for enduring the safety and protection of women. Convergence with Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) is the central themes within the Kudumbashree idea.

Documents provided in media reveals that there are programs which are taking place weekly for gender awareness and gender development. Kudumbashree always brings up some

initiatives which would benefit women. It mainly focuses upon “women” where their mission includes “reaching to the family through women and reaching to the community through the family”.

1.6.6 News articles on Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree is one among the successful organization in the country which is working for women empowerment. There have been awareness programs and discussions taking place weekly for women. Kudumbashree always functions in such a way that it would lead to poverty eradication and women empowerment.

Some of the current initiative and news on Kudumbashree includes:

- *“Kudumbashree launches yoga class for cancer patients”* (Times of India, Feb:14 2018): It was initiated by members of Corporation Area Development Societies, Kozhikode. They found nearly 24 persons in need and provide them, free classes. The trained staff of Malabar Cancer Care Society who imparted free yoga classes to cancer patients to overcome anxiety, stress and pain related to their illness.
- During “Women’s Day Celebration” many across the state have shared their experiences of the problems faced by them and the barriers they underwent to come out of it. One among them includes “Sakshyam” program which was conducted by the Kudumbashree unit of Palakkad. It was published in Madhyamam, March: 9,2018, *“Avar Paranju: Kanal Vazhi Thandiya Kadha”*. It discusses various circumstances where Kudumbashree helped them to come up in life.
- *“Campaign to sensitize men on women’s safety”*, Times of India, Dec.28:2014. The initiative 'Signature Campaign' was done by the members of Kudumbashree unit in Kochi, which would focus on women's empowerment, besides their safety. It was targeting the male population of the state. The main motive of the campaign was to reduce the atrocities faced by women. They say that “despite large-scale programmes towards increasing awareness about women's safety and taking necessary measures to ensure it, atrocities against women have not reduced”.

- *“Kerala's 'Kudumbashree School' Opens”* (NDTV, October 2017). This was done last year in order to impart training for 43 lakh members, targeting their socio-cultural, educational and overall personality development. The main motive of this initiative was to create awareness among the grass root level women about their social responsibilities and improve their standard of living through knowledge. Nearly 1.90 lakh teachers were provided training programme in 19,854 wards across the state.
- *“In Kerala, Urban Homeless May Soon Get Shelters”* (Times of India, July 11, 2017). A pilot study conducted by the Urban Center of the State found that there are 250 homeless people in the state where Kudumbashree came up with the idea of providing them shelter. Kudumbashree Executive Director S Harikishore said that “Sustainable shelter homes would be built in each urban centre across the state, according to the number of homeless identified in the survey”.

All these include the major contribution of Kudumbashree which has gained attention at the country level. Kudumbashree is an organization which is regularly working for the upliftment of rural women.

- The organization has even gained attention at the world level. *“Bahrain wants to replicate Kerala's Kudumbashree”* – State Welfare Minister (Zee News, 2014). He mentions that “the Bahraini minister showed interest in various programmes that our government is doing for women here and also with regard to social welfare. She was very much impressed by the functioning of Kudumbashree where she even discussed the “Bahrain-Kerala knowledge exchange programme”. It is very much evident that the programme has gained world level attention.
- Kudumbashree also works to empower transgender people who are being eliminated by the common people.”*Transgender people to run juice corner”*,(Times Of India, Feb.4:2018). Kudumbashree members of Kochi unit put an initiative by helping them to become small entrepreneurs. They have helped two transgender people to set up a fruit and fresh centre at Ernakulum collectorate.
- Kudumbashree makes an initiative at regular basis which would empower women at the grass root level. *“Kudumbashree to launch Jan Aushadhi stores”*, (Times Of India, Feb 6,

2108). It was implemented in order to offer generic medicines at affordable prices to the general public. It also enables women to become a small entrepreneur.

- “ *Vijayathintae EzhagalKortha Unit Vijaya*” *SHREE*”(March,3.2018): This was an article which explains about a successful woman who started making cloth bags and became an independent women
- “*VidhyarthigalkkuThunayaganKudumbashreeSnehitha*”(Malayala Manorama). This initiation is mainly functioning for girls. Kudumbashree unit of Thiruvananthapuram came with this initiative in order to reduce the atrocities faced by girls at the schools.

All these include few of the current new on Kudumbashree which portrays the status and successful functioning of the organization.

1.6.7 Unit and field used for the study

The study was conducted in Annamanda Panchayath of Thrissur District. The Panchayath has a Kudumbashree Chairperson, 18 CDS members, 7 ADS members and 267 NHG's. Out of these, the researcher has selected 2 NHG because of their active involvement in gender-related issues and high women participation.

The two units selected for the research includes Sawparnika and Shalabam. Sawparnika Unit is one of the oldest units in the panchayath and it has been actively working for the last 14 years. The women in this unit take part in all the activities where each program or activities conducted were well organized and systematic because of long years of experience. The women are well updated with everything that is happening around and they were very open to sharing their experience with the researcher. The unit has the membership of 18 members whereas, Shalabam unit has 20 members. It is one of the new units which has 6 years of experience. The researcher chose the unit not only to make a comparison between the units but also to cover different perspectives. The way of organization of the meetings was different, where the researcher found it unique.

Ayalkootam (NHG) meetings take place every Sunday, where the researcher was part of a few. Discussions and debates about the current issues in society, the collection of money, awareness about illnesses etc. are done during the meeting. Responsibilities are given to the

members to train and learn to develop leadership skills. The meeting starts with a prayer song and ends with National Anthem. It was also noticed that unity and healthy relations were maintained among the members of the unit. Kudmbaashree helps to empower women not only economically but also socially, politically and culturally which makes the unit from other SHG's and NGO's.

Kudumbashree approach is holistic in nature. It gives women an opportunity to take leadership goals, take classes, use a bank account, political participation, awareness about all religion and cultures, showcase their talents, gain self-confidence etc. Leadership skills help build self-esteem and courage in laying down their viewpoint and ideas to their fellow members. Special training is held specifically on leadership. Kudumbashree consists of a large unit of people including men working for the upliftment of women which makes the organization unique. From all these articles and news, it is evident that Kudumbashree works for women on a regular basis. It tries to eradicate all the problems at the grass root level and has gained attention at the world level. Though the main aim of the mission is to eradicate poverty and women empowerment, it covers all the aspects which help in the upliftment of rural women.

1.7 Period of study

The study includes both the primary data and secondary data. An ethnographic study was conducted from 16th April 2018 to 16th August 2018. Secondary data includes all the articles, books and magazines on women empowerment and Kudumbashree. The article on Kudumbashree was collected right from the inception.i.e. from 1988-99 to 2018.

1.8 Limitations of the study

Time management was a major constraint. Since the ethnographic study was used for the research, four months of the field was not sufficient for the researcher to explore the field.

1.9 Chapterization

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapters are divided into Introduction, Methodology, Conclusion and three chapters are divided on the basis of Themes.

Themes used in the thesis include:

1. Contextual Variations of Empowerment: Existing literature states that the meaning of empowerment varies for scholars across disciplines (Ex: Authors have varied definitions for the conceptualization of empowerment which may be decision making for one section, whereas economic power for others). The researcher also tries to find the contextual variations of empowerment through the fieldwork experience in Kudumbashree.
2. The existence of Structural Inequality: The thesis also explores the criticism against Kudumbashree in academics, mainly covering the caste and class-based discrimination.
3. Dynamics of decision-making process: A role of a woman played inside and outside the house can define her state of empowerment. As empowerment begins from the household, the thesis explores the decision-making capability of women inside her house outside of it.

Chapter one includes the introduction and design of the study. It also deals with the status of women in the society, figuring the major problems faced by them due to patriarchal norms and values along with a statement of the problems, significance of the study, research questions, methodology and period of study. The study was conducted in Kudumbashree, an organization initiated by the government of Kerala and hence detailed elaboration of the organization is also provided.

Chapter two explains the Methodology and selection of the unit. Since entering the field is the major challenge for the ethnographer, this chapter deals with how the researcher chose two units from 23000 for the field work along with the difficulties which the researcher underwent while conducting the study.

Chapter three explains the first objective of how the definition of empowerment varies across context with the review of the literature. It deals with different dimensions of empowerment taken from both primary and secondary sources.

Chapter four deals with the second objective which narrates the subsistence of structural inequalities inside Kudumbashree. It traces the status of Dalit women, resulting in proving that there is no caste and class-based discrimination prevailing inside Kudumbashree.

Chapter five includes the third objective which explains how women empowerment re-engages with patriarchy. It also explains in detail about the dynamics of decision-making process among family with few of the instances.

Chapter six includes the findings and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1 Entering the field

"The study of the culture and social organization of a particular group or community... Ethnography refers to both the data gathering of anthropology and the development of analysis of specific peoples, settings, or ways of life." (Calhoun, 2002)

Kudumbashree is a programme which is running successfully for poverty eradication and women empowerment. Tracing the history made it evident that Kudumbashree has been always successful in implementing programs which benefits people especially women. It has made drastic changes in the upliftment of rural women. Realizing that the scholarly world was largely unaware of the marginalized community, it was decided to undertake an ethnographic study of the community. Those initial and random questions formed the basis for specifying the objective of the study and for formulating the research questions. The research questions were divided into themes and subthemes. As an exploratory research that is based on long-drawn fieldwork and first-hand experience from within the qualitative research paradigm, the study was undertaken.

The research was started with an extensive pilot visit to the District main office of Kudumbashree in Thrissur district which made to assess the overall situation of the community. This provided a broad perspective to the study, and also suggested the methodological strategy to be adopted. This being an ethnographic research, a formal period of fieldwork was undertaken, using participant observation as a major tool of research. Selection of the units and the area of study were decided through the interaction with the DMC (District Mission Coordinator) who provided detailed information about the programs and functioning of it. It also enables in understanding the activities for which Kudumbashree engages with. It engages in a lot of programs which mainly focuses on Social Development, Economic Development, Women Empowerment, and Urban Projects etc... All these functions in a three-tier structure which includes NHG'S (Neighbourhood Groups) at the primary level. NHGs consist of women from

the neighbourhood areas i.e., one woman from each family is included. NHG's generally consist of 15-20 women. ADS (Area Development Program) at the ward level. Both NHG and ADS together comprises of CDS (Community Development Society) which is at the local government level. The Kudumbashree network by 15th March 2017 has 2,77,175 NHGs affiliated to 19,854 ADSs and 1073 CDSs with a total membership of 43,06,976 women. Kudumbashree membership is generally open to all adult women, limited to one membership per family. The ranking was done by the state government to particular NHGs, CDS and ADS according to their success level. This benefited in finding out the study area which is in more correlation with the objectives.

As mentioned, my first visit was to the District Mission Office, Thrissur where I met the DMC (District Mission Coordinator). The DMC was very much impressed by the research topic and talked in detail about the activities that the organizations and the units engage in. Later it was followed by small discussion with DMC, ADMC (Assistant District Mission Coordinator) and Gender RP (Resource Person).

2.2 Kudumbahree - Thrissur district

Thrissur unit comprises of 100 CDS, 14,000 ADS and 23000 NHG. It was very difficult to select 2 units out of these 23,000 units. It was not possible for me to cover the entire unit within the given time frame. Thrissur district is divided into 16 Blocks and each block possesses many panchayaths. Out of these, I ended by choosing 5 blocks which seemed to be very active in gender activities. There was a program that has happened recently for Gender named Neethan 2018, a campaign which was initiated for gender awareness and security. Finalization of the unit was also based on the report from Neetham 2018.

Thrissur District is divided into 16 Blocks. Each block consists of 6-8 CDS and 4-5 Community Counselors and Gender RPs. The main role of the Gender RPs is to figure out all the gender-related issues like harassment, abuse, violence etc. happening in their block and suggest a proper solution. They are likely to solve all the issues within the block by providing counselling and treatment. If the issue cannot be solved within the block, it is then taken to "Snehitha", which is a Gender help desk, functioning in all districts.

2.3 Snehitha

Snehitha is 24 hours working gender help desk which avails support and help to women in the society. The main objective of the initiative includes the ability to provide help and support to women and children who face problems like sexual harassments, domestic violence, trafficking and also to those women who are in distress. Snehitha also looks to develop the socio-economic status of the young and underprivileged women by providing necessary skills and knowledge which helps in empowering them with self-confidence and independence. They try to figure out all the gender-related issues and helps in sorting it out. It helps women by providing immediate shelter, help and counselling. In the case of victims of any violence and harassments, legal assistance is also provided. Initially, it was started in 2013 at three districts namely Malappuram, Ernakulam and Trivandrum. Later it was started in three more districts namely Wayanad, Palakkad and Idukki. Till September 2017 total 8267 cases have been reported to all these six Snehitha, among this 3240 were the direct case and 4992 were reported over the telephone. From September to October 2017, Snehitha has been started in all fourteen District of Kerala. Snehitha consists 11 staffs and all of them are women. There are 2 counsellors, 5 service providers, 1 office assistant, 2 securities and one caretaker in Snehitha (Kudumbashree, 2018).

Snehitha tries to sort out all the cases within its limit. If it is not getting cleared, Snehitha helps women in facilitating other institutional agencies like legal service authority, police department and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations).

2.4 Services of Snehitha

- 24 hours working gender help desk.
- Short stay home for women and children who are facing atrocities and violence.
- Short stay for those women who are travelling alone at the night.
- Family, individual, adolescent and premarital counselling.
- Awareness campaigns.
- Legal and medical assistance.
- 24 hours Tele counselling
- Rehabilitation through the convergence with other departments and NGO's

Gender help desk of Thrissur District is situated in Poothole and is established on November 11, 2017. It is a women-friendly organization working 24*7. It has 11 staff including 2 councillors. All the matters concerning gender will be done in snehitha. Meetings happen frequently in the District mission office for updating the gender activities. There are separate Community councillors and Gender Resource Persons (Gender RPs) to especially consider all gender-related issues happening in their neighbourhoods.

Structuring of Gender Help Desk in the district includes

- District level – Gender Resource Centre
- Panchayath level – Gender Corner
- Block level- Community Councilor
- Ward level- Gender Guard

It is the duty of all these individuals to figure out all the problems happening around and report it in the snehitha. All the issues will not be directly taken to Snehitha. Community councillors will try to clear it in the panchayat level. If not happening, then it is taken to Snehitha, if it was not sorted there, it is then taken to legal authorities. As of now, Thrissur District is reported with

- Direct Case – 194
- Tele Case- -350
- Short Stay – 79
- Counselling – 423
- Domestic Violence- 37
- Atrocities against children -7

While having a formal communication with the main counsellor of the Gender Help Desk, it was observed that 50% of the cases are sorted out and rests are following up. Vigilant Group is also there who only takes care of Gender issues happening in the panchayath. The victim may not necessarily be a Kudumbashree member. It is the duty of the Gender groups to take care of all issues related to gender in their panchayath. Hence it was observed that Kudmbashree helps in removing all the problems faced by women and helps in empowering them, no matter of being into the organization.

Discussion with the councillor in snehitha benefited me in having a broad idea about the structuring of the field work. Later, after having a discussion with them who is-in charge of Gender head, I chose 5 blocks to visit, in order to select 2 NHGs (ayalkootam) out of 23000 units. The selection was based on the performance in gender-related activities and Neetham campaign 2018, by evaluating their statistics. Since it was an ethnographic study and four months of fieldwork period being given, detailed study of all the units wouldn't be possible. Hence the idea of selection of two units is been rose. Not only that, it would also enable me in having a deep observation of each and every component throughout the field. The major tool being used in the study includes an in-depth interview and participant observation. I also tried covering all the ayalkootam meetings, programs and awareness classes that have been conducted during the course of time.

Out of 16 blocks in the Thrissur district, the places which was selected includes:

- Mala Block
- Chavakkad Block
- Panancherry Block
- Puzhakkal Block
- Cherpu Block

I visited all these blocks and had both formal and informal conversation with the chairperson of these blocks. I tired involving in discussion with Gender Rp's (Resource Person) and community councillors of the particular units to know more about gender. All the above blocks seem to be very much active in their activities and were unique in some or the other way. Convenience and availability of the respondents throughout the study was also an important matter of concern. I also tried covering the themes and subthemes of the study while having a discussion with the people. There were many projects like Neetham, Vigilant group formation; Sthreeyum Sancharavum, gender corner day celebration etc happening, and some units were behind the 'kudumbshree Varshigam' celebration. My physical presence was seen in the council meeting, varshigam celebration, manufacturing unit etc in order to have clarity about the field.

During the discussion with the gender councillors, all the women possess an opinion that gender equality and awareness class should be provided to all people. Feminism has taken a drastic change to what actually the concept is. It includes equality .i.e. equal status and

opportunity to men and women. It is not about having men over women or women over men relation. Nowadays the concept has gained the meaning of women over men. All the Gender councillors were asked to know the proper definition of the Gender before conducting awareness classes. The other major discussion which was happening includes the perspective of society towards women. It is only through these classes we can break all these shells. One-Gender RP stated:

“The society needs women to remain silent in certain circumstances and it is her duty not to open up her view. Eg: Sexuality (*Thurannu parayan padillaennu samooham paranja chila karyangal, nammal gender classes'-iloodae polichadakkanam*). When we were taking the interview as a part of Neetham 2018, all the answers related to sexuality was either blank or women doesn't want to answer. They were shy to answer such questions (*Ayye.... why are you asking all such kind of bad questions*). Complete empowerment is not possible with situations like this. Sexuality includes the neutral decision of both men and women. She continued by saying that, though women are being empowered, women's control over sex is restricted by men. It is the same in the case of Kudumbashree women too. There are even cases reported were women were subjected to involve into sex when she is not well. Where have all the empowerment and feminism gone in such cases?”

This discussion brought awareness about all the things which has to be conveyed to the common people. Domestic violence too happens as a result, where women are not ready to talk about such incidents openly in the forum. One participant added that only 2% of women populations are ready to say it in open. At an earlier stage it was not possible for women to share; now many organizations emerge and it enables a woman to share all her views. It is also the duty of the community councillor to take each and every case in a proper way before concluding or providing a suggestion. Though we work for the safety and protection of women, we should try to sort out the issue only by hearing the explanation of both the parties. They again brought into the situation of the following case;

“Imagine a case of a daughter in law and mother in law having a fight. Mother in law hit the daughter in law with the pan. Whose side will you stand? Whom will you support?”

We should always try to hear the situation first and should act accordingly.”

By hearing such certain situations, we will stand with the daughter in law because of the situation. We always fail to inquire the reason behind the mother-in-law hitting the daughter-in-law. What if the mother-in-law hit her because of some valid reason? Hence analyses should be done only after having a complete understanding of the situation. We should always consider the fact that, one should not get convinced or biased or not even influenced by any factors.

The later during the visit to Chandrapinni area, I visited a Library which is run only by women in Kudmbashree. It was taken care by 11 women. The library was initially formed by a few retired men in the particular area. Later they failed to run it and kept it in public auction. Kudumbashree women came with the idea of taking it with the permission of higher authority. Now it is functioning very successfully and it has benefited many people. Though there are not many books, the ones available are utilized by many. They are even in a tie with many other organizations for the collection of books. During a discussion with the councillor of that area, it was observed the changes that happened to her because of Kudumbashree. (From Kudmbashree member to ADS member then to CDS chairperson).

These all include the major observation while visiting the places. The finalization of 2 units (which is situated in Annamanda panchayath) from these 5 blocks was based on the interactions happened to have with the CDS chairpersons, community councillors and gender RPs of the above-mentioned units.

2.5 About the field

The point of entry is very important in an ethnographic work. Hence, I will begin by discussing entry first, and then move on to the dimensions of my long journey with the Kudumbashree women that I chose to study.

Entry into Annamanada (2018): It was June 8, 2018, and the place was Annamanda of Mala Panchayath. I'm a research scholar who is studying about the conceptualization of the term empowerment and its challenges and dynamics with the context of Kudumbashree. I met the Chairperson of Mala Panchayath named Mrs Mini. Later I collected the details and records about the units and preferred choosing Shalabham and Sawparnika unit of Annamanda. Since ethnographic study has been done, I preferred staying in Mala area which would enable me to know more about the participants in an elaborated manner.

Annamanda is a place which belongs to Mala Panchayath of Thrissur District. The place is close to Ernakulam district and hence it is the border of Thrissur and Ernakulam district. The Panchayath has got a Kudumbashree Chairperson, 18 CDS members, 7 ADS members and 267 NHG's. Out of these, I selected 2 NHG because of their active involvement in gender-related issues and high women participation. Sawparnika Unit is one of the oldest units in the panchayath and it has been actively working for the last 14 years. The women in this unit take part in all the activities where each program and activities conducted were well organized and systematic because of long years of experience. The women are well updated with everything that is happening around and they were very open in sharing their experience to me. The unit has a membership of 18 members. Shalabam unit has 20 members. It is one of the new units which have 6 years of experience. The selection of the unit was to not only to make a comparison between the units but also to cover different perspectives. The way of organization of the meetings was different, where the researcher found it unique.

Ayalkootam (NHG) meetings take place every Sunday, where I was part of a few. Discussions and debates about the current issues in society, a collection of money, awareness about illnesses etc. are done during the meeting. Responsibilities are given to the members to train and learn to develop leadership skills. The meeting starts with a prayer song and ends with National Anthem. It is also noticed that there were unity and healthy relations maintained among the members of the unit. Kudumbashree follows a holistic approach of empowering women socially, economically, politically and culturally.

2.6 Initiatives taken by the block members

- Skit group: Giving awareness through performances in the public spaces which includes Bus stand, bus stops, in front of medical college etc. Most of the social issues are taken into consideration. Eg: consuming electricity, reducing rape, harassments, saving water, protection against street dogs etc. These include few of the skits that the participant have performed.
- Blood buds: The panchayath will appoint a person who carries the list of people who are ready to donate blood and list it according to their blood groups. When a person is in need of the blood, the authority does the necessary arrangements to reach it out within a short span of time.

- Chorakku cheera padhahthi (part of blood buds). Each house is provided with 2 kg of spinach, which they are supposed to plant it compulsorily as spinach is good for blood formation. This concept was widely accepted by the entire district and it was the chairperson of the panchayath who initiated it.
- Snehitha Women Canteen: ‘Thattukada concept’. There are instances where women fail to enter the tattuakda because of fear and awkwardness. Hence the concept of canteen “SnehithaVanitha canteen” emerges. Now they do take orders and provide catering service. It is completely women-friendly in nature.
- Two-wheeler army (WE CAN): Teaching driving to women in that locality which enables women to travel anywhere without depending on anyone. It can also help in reducing the harassments happening to women during the night. It helps women to go for getting emergency requirements without depending on others (eg: getting vegetables, dropping their children to school, going to the hospital, paying electricity bill etc.)
- Pappadam Manufacturing: Manufacturing pappad with the members of the unit which would benefit the whole. It aids women in getting some job and also helps in engaging their leisure time valuable. It is handmade pappad without any chemical.
- Life Pathadhi: Providing brick for the construction of free houses.
- Plastic Recycling Unit: The panchayath appoint 2 people from each unit for the collection of waste plastics from all households which will be recycled and reused in the company which has formed.

2.7 Methodology used

The methodology which is widely used in the study includes Ethnography study. Tools majorly include in-depth interview and participant observation. This enables in having a proper ethnographic study, though there was time constraints. The interaction extended also to their family members which benefited me in having understanding and also observing the themes in an elaborative manner. The themes including dynamics in decision making capability challenges to patriarchy and conceptualizing empowerment has covered using ethnographic study. It is more evident to say that, an ethnographic study has benefited in covering the objectives in an academic way. Besides this, the article “Why Patriarchy” by Steven Goldberg quotes that the topics like patriarchy and women dominance can be studied properly only through an ethnographic study

which includes detailed observation. It helps in figuring the problems in a deep manner. This includes another major reason for conducting an ethnographic study (Goldberg, 2008).

Focus group discussion also has taken place during the ayalkootam meetings. The major discussions were regarding conceptualizing empowerment and dynamics of decision making. There was also a survey which was collected as a part of Neetham 2018. It was noticed that the subjects remained silent while having a discussion regarding sexuality. As mentioned above by the Gender RP, it was felt personally that women are ready to do everything for getting their rights and duties but the same women remain silent for the matters concerning sexuality. Where has complete empowerment gone? The subjects requested to ask some other questions than having discussions regarding the same. The concept of sexuality can also be considered as an element of getting complete empowerment. The same was responded while having discussion with the higher authorities, where they responded facing a similar situation and mentioned the difficulty in erasing particular concept. They also included that, it is due to all such instances domestic violence still prevail in our society. We do always fight for domestic violence and sexual harassment, if the mentality of women especially rural women remains the same, there is no complete solution to it. Hence it was felt on personal aspect that everyone ended up asking such questions and trying to cover all another aspect of empowerment. We should realize that complete empowerment is not possible henceforth.

2.8 Women empowerment (*Stree sakhikaranam*)

The concept that is widely used in this research mainly includes women empowerment .i.e. *sthree sakhtheekaranam* in Malayalam. The concept in Malayalam has gained popularity recently. It is obvious, that it is through the involvement of such organizations. In fact, I was even not aware of the concept and it is through one of the participants, I came to know about the usage of the term. Interactions with all the participants made me realize that the concept has gained so much importance and meaning in the life of all rural women. The popularity of the concept was mainly because of the awareness classes which were provided by the organization. All have their own meaning of what the concept is. Their explanation and perspective about the concept are elaborated in detail in the next chapter.

Kudumbahsree has given those women the real meaning of empowerment as it follows a holistic way of empowerment which helps in empowering women socially, economically, culturally and politically. Women empowerment (*sthree saktheekaranam*) in Malayalam has a split meaning which includes gaining full energy for a woman. It is obvious to say that the literal meaning of empowerment is not used anywhere in the Malayalam language. It would be even more appropriate to mention that, there is no term used for empowerment which makes the reader clear about the importance of the term. The term '*stree saktheekaranam*' is emerged only because of the emergence of such organization. Hence we should analyze the fact about how the patriarchal society is influencing us, though some part of Kerala does practice matriarchy. Kerala being the state which has the highest literacy rate in the country and highest sex ratio, the situation still remains the same.

2.9 Advantages and disadvantages of ethnographic study

Ethnography enables in creating an interpretive framework through which it is better to understand the internal (emotions) and external (contextual) factors which affect behaviour. An ethnographer assumes that people know the best about their culture and the aspects of their lives and learning from them is the best way of drawing information and generating knowledge about their lives. The ethnographer tends to live and involve with them in all their behaviour as being one among them. Meeting the respondents on a regular meeting, having discussion mainly informal, participant observation, focus group discussions etc. all enables in covering all the minute part of the study. Since ethnographic study includes all the methods, it was convenient to use the discussions according to the situation. The leisure time with the children's also helps in finding out the decision-making capability of their mother through informal conversations. The participants were personally attached to the researcher where they tend to share all the instances without fear, which benefited in getting proper answers. Participant observation at times has helped in finding out the actual situation inside the house. This wouldn't be possible without ethnographic study.

There is a problem of being close to the subjects. They tend to emotionally attach to the researcher and share their experience, though the researcher is there for the study. Some of their experiences were shared in a manner in which the participant doesn't want it to be revealed. Spending four months of time in the field makes all the respondents have special care towards

the researcher. The researcher always made sure that she is always keeping in mind about the researcher's code of conduct and ethics. It was not possible for the researcher to give a negative response to the respondents, as it affects the study. The language was another problem. Spending four months and having an in-depth conversation without proper language makes the situation problematic. Research being conducted in a rural area; colloquial Malayalam language was used which was difficult for the researcher at an initial stage. There were even instances where the entire community changes the schedule of the meeting for the convenience of the researcher. This shows how the respondents personally got attached to the researcher. In such a situation, it is always the duty of the researcher to keep a distance as a researcher. Being the ethnographer, it is our duty to be one among them. But at the same time, we should also consider that the same scenario is not influencing us to get biased.

CHAPTER 3

Contextual variation of empowerment

3.1 Introduction

“Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both controls over resources and over ideology... a growing intrinsic capability greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one’s consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers” (S. Kishore, 2004). As mentioned, Women Empowerment includes the situation of empowering women which enables in solving all problems faced by women of being labelled as “Second Sex”. It also refers to a situation of enhancing social, economic, political and legal power for the women, where one can live a life of self-worth, respect and dignity. They often have troubles to get equal treatment. The conceptualization of women’s empowerment has always remained a challenge and different authors have defined the concept in different ways. Difficulty in defining the concept emerges the fact that there exist different forms of empowerment .i.e., the meaning of empowerment can vary according to different contexts, both time and space. There is no commonly accepted definition given to empowerment. The concept has some generally agreed upon qualities and definitions in the academic community, but how the concept is used among different culture may still vary.

The term empowerment is associated and linked with a wide area of developmental programs like Microfinance, Micro Enterprises, Self Help Groups, Poverty eradication... This plethora of meanings has developed the multitude of programs for women’s development also creating confusion about its conceptualization. But it is always notable that, the initiation like this always enables in women’s social, economic, political and cultural empowerment.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter different scholars across disciplines have defined it in ways that are different from each other. And hence the difficulty in defining empowerment also emerges from the fact that there exists a different form of empowerment that is Social, Economic and Political Empowerment. Each concept defines empowerment in a different way.

“Social empowerment is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the

institutions and discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty” (Combaz & McLoughlin, 2014).

“Economic empowerment is thought to allow poor people to think beyond immediate daily survival and to exercise greater control over both their resources and life choices. For example, it enables households to make their own decisions around making investments in health and education and taking risks in order to increase their income”(Combaz & McLoughlin, 2014)

“ Political empowerment is characterized by producers organizing collectively and attempting to enhance their influence and bargaining power – not simply with respect to other market actors, but also in terms of the development policy process itself and in relation to bodies such as local and national government, regional and global institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donor agencies, all of which significantly determine whether small-scale producers operate within an enabling or disabling environment”(Utting, 2012)

Scholars across discipline have explained the concept and have defined it in a way according to their academic curriculum where they fail to cover the other aspect of it. In the above-mentioned definition, it is noticed that the same author has defined the concept in two different contexts and hence we can understand that the definition changes across context. Sociological surroundings matter a lot; it can mould one’s behaviour. Beside this, the authors like Andre Beteille, Nussbaum etc explains the meaning of empowerment in the context of the country where the similar meaning cannot be applied to Kudumbashree women who believe more in traditional norms, values and ethics.

Gender inequality very much prevailed in our society and hence empowerment is in an unfinished state. Egalitarianism lacks at each and every aspects of lives. As mentioned in the above chapter the concept ‘Sthree sakteekaram’(women empowerment) started gaining its preference and importance in the life of rural women majorly after the involvement to Kudumbashree. Still, it varies across context like how it varies across disciplines.

This chapter aims to provide greater specificity about the definition and conceptualization of empowerment with reference to existing literature and makes the reader

clear about the concept of empowerment. The chapter also includes the fieldwork experiences of the researcher among Kudumbashree women, an organization in Kerala working for poverty eradication and women empowerment.

3.2 Existing literature about conceptualizing empowerment

Of all the buzzwords that have entered, Empowerment is, of course, the term which is widely used and even abused. But the reality is that many are still unaware of the concept. The meaning of empowerment varies according to a different cultural context where my study attempts to address how is it relative, how it has undergone changes and its relevance. Many studies have been conducted for women empowerment and a lot of problems have been figured. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the dynamics of empowerment.

Many Non- Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Self Help Groups (SHG) and organizations like Kudumbashree etc have emerged for safeguarding women. It always aims at the betterment of women; where the situation of women remains the same. It is also logical that drastic changes in the status of women have taken place when compared to the primitive older society; still, the problems faced by women have not yet stopped. Taylor and Francis, Ltd. (1992) submitted an agenda about empowering women for gender equity and published an article named "The Natal Association for Women Empowerment" which explains about NEWA (National Association for Women's Empowerment). This association came into the picture with the main aim to resolve the major issues faced by women and also for women's upliftment. The major contribution includes equality in all resources, avoiding gender discriminations and skill development. This is also an organization which is working for the empowerment of women. This can be proven that the government is taking steps to bring women to the mainstream, but the question of why it has not reached to maximum should be considered. In a similar manner, an article by M. Deivam (2008) explains about economic empowerment of women through Mahalir Thittam which is an organization in the state actively working for women empowerment. The article highlights the importance of economic empowerment. The author mentions that political empowerment cannot be attained in the lack of economic empowerment. The author continues by stating that women empowerment always depends upon factors like education, family planning, hard work, health, medical services and cleanliness. Women

empowerment particularly economic empowerment takes place actively with the involvement of women into all such organizations.

The article by Oluwole Odutolu, Adebola Adedimeji, Funmilayo Olatidoye (2003) explains about how economic empowerment can act as a barrier in negotiating the problems faced by women, which in their study they explain about sexual harassments. Employment exterior home can provide women with a moral leverage to challenge patriarchal controls over their sexual and reproductive lives. The quantitative study traces the status of women and the issues regarding AIDS and STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) are found high among teenagers. It was noticed that many depend upon such activities owing to their financial status. And Hence the study concludes that economic empowerment with proper educational skills can help in reducing such problems. We should also consider that fact that; economic empowerment alone cannot make a person empowered. For example, the states like Punjab and countries like Saudi Arabia, economic empowerment is highly seen where they lack all other forms of empowerment due to strong patriarchal norms. Sandeep Kaur (2010) in his article explains the situation of the state Punjab, which is considered to be economically empowered. The state has good economic status yet the situation of women here is equal to other counterparts in the world due to its strong patriarchal values.

Empowerment can also be measured in terms of development and in terms of providing equality in giving opportunity. Therefore, the development of a country or a state can't be measured in terms of its materials growth but in terms of the opportunities and capabilities of its people to explore material resources and to contribute equally in the growth of their society. Anita M. Weiss, Akmal Hussain and Zeba A. Sathar (2001) in their article mentions that empowering women outcome in a wide range of social changes for the country, but to do so, is not an easy task. Besides this, empowering the one who is disempowered makes the endeavour more challenging and difficult. The study mainly discusses the situation of Pakistan and how empowerment had played a role in bringing up their status. Though they started gaining economic status the complete development was lacking due to Social development, empowerment of women and the expansion of civil societies. Hence the country tried to gain complete development through women's equal involvement to all resources.

The process of empowerment has to begin in a women's individual consciousness and later has to be externalized through physical mobility, greater autonomy, compensated labour and a strong role in the household. According to Kamal and Princy (2006), the three important components of empowerment include resources, agencies and achievements, which are derived from the existing literature. Women tend to be empowered if she possesses all these three components. The Author mentions about education as a better solution to access all these three components, as education enables providing awareness about the reality, schemes and policies. Same as mentioned in the article by Hung, A., J. Yoong and E. Brown (2012). It says that on an average, women perform worse than men on tests of financial knowledge and have less confidence in their financial skills. This was the result of a study conducted in Paris. The study states that it is mainly due to the lack of awareness access to education to the existing financial policies. Awareness can provide a woman with the ability to come up in life.

Though, few authors mention Education as an important factor for empowering a woman. In the Journal article "Education and Women's Empowerment" published by Economic and Political Weekly (1994) explains that though education is an important factor, it alone can't give her socio-economic development. Education provides awareness about the reality which can make a woman independent, but the scenario across the country is such that parents are not much inclined in providing her higher education as she ended up in going to some other family which won't provide them with any material resources. Unless and until the mentality of the people across the world remains same, the empowerment of women cannot take place completely.

The article by Haque, Md Rajwanul; Mostofa, Md Golam; Babar, Z M (2017) makes a comparison about violence's faced by educated and uneducated women. The study revealed that women are subjected to a large amount of violence by her spouse and family members resulting in problems from family to the community. It was proved that women those who understand about their rights are hiding their torture for the sake of endurable spousal bond. The author concludes by stating that violence against women interrupt the empowerment and is suggested to provide an effective policy to minimize the gap between men and women and to ensure their rights in every sphere of life.

Srilatha Batliwala (2007) in her article traces the practices of empowerment to a current scenario which includes the existence of Self-Help Groups and Mahila Samajans. The deepest

structure of social power is challenged by the constriction of the concept. The author explains about giving all forms of power like political and social power which helps in breaking the closed shell of women created by the society. Hence it explains the importance of power in empowerment. In general, power also includes the power to make a decision or control something. It can start from the doorstep level. Decision-making power in the household includes the decision over children's education, marriage etc.

Few writers have emphasized empowerment as a process of helping people to gain control over their lives. Bob Pease (2002) argues that writers of fundamentally different philosophical and ideological positions all use it to advance their dispute, which signifies that different scholars across different disciplines defined it in different ways of arguments in defining the concept. The precedence of power relations is also studied with Foucault theory of power. Illustrating upon Foucault's analysis of power the study affirms that the tension intrinsic in the professional-client relationship is likely to undermine empowering interventions unless that relationship itself is reconstructed and the professional knowledge base upon which it rests is subjected to critical analysis. Power is something which is making a personal empowerment, predominantly political power in which case the duty of the social workers to provide awareness on self- discipline and self- regulatory processes. "Women not only want access to resources but also control over them. They not only want to participate in decision-making through quotas for women but with full rights as equal citizens. Women don't only want to work in any employment opportunity, but in protected and decent work" (E.kuttab, 2010). Giving and gaining power does play a vital role in empowering women.

Power alone can't make a person fully empowered, though few scholars have discussed the importance of power in empowerment. Contextual variations do play a major role in the empowerment of women. Empowerment as a concept can take different forms in different cultural settings and even historical setting. There is no homogenous way of imagining empowerment. The Indian concept of empowerment need not be the same as a western concept of empowerment. Cultural base discrimination occurs as a result. In an article by Townsend, Scott and Markham (1990) which is conducted in twenty-eight countries across five different culture clusters studied the relationship between country- based and culture-based differences in pay practices. Articles reveal that the term empowerment varies according to different cultural settings. Discriminations vary

much prevailed in the society. It was very much relevant from the study that significant differences were found between countries in terms of pay level, the largest portion of the variance in the relationship between wages and benefits due to cultural affiliation. Cultural background plays a very vital role. And so is the concept of empowerment among these cultural clusters also varies.

Empowerment offers much for many people in organizations and also to those who depend on organizations, where most of the benefits are positive, leading to organizational and individual growth but, there are even few changes and actual causalities which may tend to the misuse of empowerment. Jeffrey and Frederick (1996) in explain empowerment in an organizational culture. They defined empowerment to four forms which include Role Empowerment, Reward Empowerment, Process Empowerment and Governance Empowerment. Empowerment takes place in different forms within the framework of an organization but the beneficiaries should always be those who deserve and not everyone which lead to a conventional redundancy situation. The article by Nichola Torbett (2008), talks in detail about empowerment and democracy. Empowerment can take place at its full strength only if the individual possesses the confidence and courage to overcome it. Though there are many initiations, the fear level of women have not come-up, resulting in all the discarded outcomes. Much of the problems in the society can be reduced if the women gained the courage. The author mentions that the more we need is the courage to explore the root causes and also to face the fear. The dilemma is that people are willing to do many things .i.e. the confidence level has increased but not the level of courage. If we are confident in our caring but less so in our courage, we should rethink courage, too. And hence the courage to respond to the situation can make a person empowered.

Though attempts have been made by many scholars for the conceptualization of empowerment, the other component or barrier to the concept includes inequality. Inequalities do prevail in society. Andre Beteille (1999) in his article portraits the most deep-rooted form of inequality that is built in the traditional Indian society. It is observed as those based on gender and caste. It was prevailed in the primitive older society and continues to exist. As a result of westernization and industrialization, the social attitude of the people are changed which is again followed by the changes of law. Despite all such changes women are being discriminated from getting equal status and are treated inferior. India's archaic social hierarchy is noticeably at

probability with its present political system. And hence the author clearly mentions about how the stereotype of gender discrimination is still prevailing among the mindset of the people.

Nassbaum (2000) in her book explains the problems faced by women, especially in third world countries. She quotes that “Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of human life, they are very less nourished than Men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual violence” (C.Nassbaum, 2000). She explains about bargaining theory, according to Nassbaum, it helps in maintaining egalitarianism for women. Women tend to question all the inequalities which help in bringing up the status of women. Nassbaum concludes that Gender justice and concern for women helps in improving the situation of women. Sangeetha Purushothaman (1997) on the other hand explains how a woman is empowered after her involvement with many governmental and non-governmental sectors. Her book mainly says about Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) through which empowerment among women takes place. The main concern for the emergence of Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) was due to the lack of income, information and access to Material resources which are considered as the major problems faced by the women.

Women are always subjected to problems like disempowerment, lack of space, self, disprivilege, sexist discrimination, gender inequality, invisibility, marginalization etc. Jugal Kishore Mishra’s (2006) perspective is that, though efforts are taken in Social Movement Theory, the dynamics of Women Empowerment has not been taken into Indian Gender mainstream strategies. Empowerment of women in India always has specific goals. i.e. Gender-specific goals. The main aim is to eliminate devaluation, marginalization, displacement and ultimate dispensability which also includes the abolition of gender-based discrimination, partaking of women in policy and decision-making processes. To make in to practice women in India have to swim upstream so as to able to defeat the traditional military. Though Indian Constitution guarantees Equality it is not taken into consideration. Women empowerment can always be related to Empowerment of Nature which would cause to world peace, ecofeminism and Social Mobility. It is always the duty of women to fight for their right and duties.

Women's agency, autonomy and empowerment are widely used ideas in development literature. Nripendra Kishore Mishra and Tulika Tripathi (2011) try to differentiate these three concepts through their study on “Conceptualizing Women's Agency, Autonomy and

Empowerment". Women's agency is an essential factor in women's empowerment, where agency includes "inner transformation" so that women are able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able but entitled to make choices (C.Nassbaum, 2000). Existing literature makes evident information that both the concept of autonomy and empowerment are different in nature. In the Indian scenario, obtainable literature makes obvious that large number of women do not have autonomy regarding value choices like decision making and gender role attitude. This suggests that we should look beyond economic resources or material prosperity and should look broadly into cultural and social influences, which have a larger role to play in shaping women's autonomy and agency, which may be necessarily related with women's empowerment.

As mentioned earlier, SHG 's, Microfinance programs, NGO's etc. always helps in bringing up the status of women, though all these have their own special way of considering the components like economy, politics, culture etc. Different scholars across disciplines have explained about all such organizations in their own perspectives. Microfinance plays a major role in the upliftment of women socially and economically. Lots of governmental and nongovernmental organizations have emerged for the welfare of women. Castro N Gichuki, Milcah Mulu-Mutuku and Lydia N Kinuthia (2014) observed the involvement of many women to small enterprises which help in increasing their economic status. Report by World Bank (2009) indicated that women entrepreneurs comprise about a half of human resources in developing economies. The report also identifies women entrepreneurs as key facilitators of microeconomic development in their communities. Involvement of women to these sector helps in betterment in their standard of living. Women's involvement in these sectors not only provides social and economic growth but also helps in capacity building. Rebekah J, RN (2010) study suggests that the women who urge to participate in microcredit were not concentrated around money. There were greater emphasis on building capacity through education, social and community networking.

This makes the reason of me choosing an organization like Kudumbashree which helps in empowering women not only economically but also socially, politically and culturally. It adopts a holistic approach of empowerment which stands out from other SHG's and NGO's and makes the organization unique. An organization like this also helps in providing awareness about all the schemes and policies for women which results in women's betterment. The study is also mainly known for its ethnographic study.

3.3 Kudumbashree and empowerment

Kudumbashree is an organization which is working mainly for women empowerment. There are several numbers of schemes and policies for the upliftment of women. Weekly based meetings are held in NHGs (Neighborhood groups) such as discussions on the current issues, sharing of experiences, formal and informal training sessions etc, are done which helps in broadening the perspective of women on better health care, better social status, better education and economic status. To improve economic development, suitable skill development training is also provided.

As mentioned in the methodology, the study was conducted in Annamanda Panchayath of Thrissur District. The Panchayath has a Kudumbashree Chairperson, 18 CDS members, 7 ADS members and 267 NHG's. Out of these, the researcher has selected 2 NHG's because of their active involvement in gender-related issues and high women participation. The two units selected for the study includes Sawparnika and Shalabam.

Ayalkootam (NHG) meetings take place every Sunday, where I was part of a few. Discussions and debates about the current issues in society, a collection of money, awareness about illnesses etc. are done during the meeting. Responsibilities are given to the members to train and learn to develop leadership skills. The meeting starts with a prayer song and ends with National Anthem. It is also noticed that there were unity and healthy relations maintained among the members of the unit. Tools majorly include; in-depth interviews, participant observations and inters communication throughout the fieldwork. The participants mainly include Local councillor, Gender Resource Person (Gender RP of Kudmbashree), community Councilor of Kudimbashree, housewives, women working for daily wages and employees. The general responses from the respondents were that each of them was fortunate and grateful to Kudumbashree.

3.4 Varying definition of empowerment

As mentioned, empowerment can vary according to different sections and people differently. It varies across different context and scholars. For some, it may be economical, for some social, for few political or cultural. It was also noticed through the fieldwork that the conceptualization of empowerment can take up different forms. The meaning of empowerment for a woman from SC/ST class will be different from that of upward class, in a similar way empowerment varies from person to person in an ayalkootam (NHG). Contextual variation of

empowerment is also possible like how it varies from a woman from a western country to that of women from the Middle East part. Mentioning in the perspective of the literature review which is mentioned above, great scholars like Andre Beteille, Sangeetha Purushothaman, JK.Misra, Srilatha Batliwala etc.. have explained empowerment in their own way which cannot be equally applicable to my respondents who are residing in the rural areas of Kerala. Explaining in terms of the units considered for the study, the researcher personally feels that the contextual variation is more or less the same because of the subjects residing in the same locality. The major variation noticed was the familial influence and barriers which the subjects are exposed to. Hence the following definitions include few responses which were gained during the interaction with the participants. They redefine the concept in their way. Few of the definition includes:

Participant 1:

“Women is said to be empowered when she possesses the talent to express her view without any fear. I am a ward member (local councillor) and I am here because of Kudumbashree. It helps in showcasing my talents and gave me an opportunity to involve into politics. Though women are being empowered, they have not reached to a maximum where many things are yet to change. It is always expected for women to keep quiet in a forum. This is not written anywhere in the constitution but these are all “expected behaviour” in the society. Nobody considers me as a girl because I speak loud. I am an outspoken person. The government has provided many opportunities, and initiation like Kudumbashree also works for women’s betterment. Still, we can’t find a woman fully empowered. And hence empowerment should begin within the personality of women and from the mindset of the society. If changes in personality of each and every individual occur, empowerment of women can take place easily”.

It was noticed that, she was very outspoken in all her activities. Visit to panchayath office made it evident that she is different from the rest. It was also evident from the way she responds to all questions especially on gender. She quotes that everything should begin from the personality of a woman, if they tend to adopt changes it can channel to changes in society. It is not always expected for women to remain silent in the forum. The only place where I observe women being outspoken is during our ayalkootam (NHG) meeting. I

always wonder why women residue silent in panchayath meeting, as it is the duty of the entire local councillor, to talk for the people. She concluded by saying that women should possess the courage to overcome everything. In addition to it, she also added that government should guarantee strong punishment to men who are involving in all such malpractices of abusing and harassing women. (This conversation was made long before the implication of PATO)

Participant 2:

“Women are empowered if she has proper educational qualification and knowledge. I am the person who got all opportunity to go everywhere. Kudumbashree has provided me with many aids which benefited me increasing my financial status, political participation and social behaviour. I don’t always feel complete, I lack educational qualification. Hence I think education has a significant role in making a woman empowered”.

In the above case, it was noticed that she was feeling accountable to convey the fact that she didn’t get a proper education. She refused the fact that women empowerment without education can exist. She repeats by mentioning that, I don’t want the same to happen to my children where I am providing them a good education. She appreciates Kudumbashree for providing women with the awareness classes which helps in updating women to the reality.

Participant 3:

“I think courage to overcome the situation and live in society can make women fully empowered. Women get worried for each and everything that is happening around and keep themselves a step behind fearing all these, which can make her disempowered. As the society is changing and adapting new things, women should also change and be bold enough to compete it. Courage, boldness, and independence to make a decision, makes a woman empowered”.

Fearing to the situation welcomes the worse situations. Boldness to overcome situation makes the situation better. It is our duty to break the shell and come out of it. Researcher feels that she was not so outspoken when compared to the rest, though she possesses the ability to overcome

the situation. She belongs to the orthodox Muslim family and she was grown abiding those rules, like covering the head with dupatta, being quite in the forum and was dependent on her family for everything. Hence she fails to have the boldness in her. I do respect her belief in religion and found that there are no other barriers than fear, which is preventing her from coming forward.

Participant 4:

“There is a lot of initiation and implementation by the governmental and non-governmental organization, but still the empowerment of women is questionable. Cooperation among people is hardly seen. A woman alone cannot come out and make changes. It requires a teamwork and cooperation among people. All women should come along and join their hand for a single cause. It helps in making changes easily”.

Women can't fight alone. She as a single person cannot make any changes in society. All women should together hold the hand for the mass change. She added that tracing all the situations where women claimed to be victims are either due to lack of courage or over courage. She mentions an example about eve teasing. The possibility of eve teasing will be minimal when there is a cluster of women walking in the road than the single individual passing by. Courage should always outstand among women.

A few other responses include.

Participant 5:

“For women to be fully empowered, it has to be initiated from the family environment. Women should live without depending on others. They should live independently, i.e. in terms of job practices and decision making. But the same independence should not be misused in the name of over independence”.

She added that it is not that all the issues happened to women emerges all at an instant. It was there from a primitive ancient society. It was just the fact that, it didn't come to notice because of lack of factors such as technology, awareness and courage. She accepted the fact that courage of women has increased due to all these kind of initiation and advancement in technology. This

conversation has led to a group discussion with the respondent and the panchayath Gender Resource Person (Gender RP).The Gender RP quoted that :

“Initially, none of them (including me) couldn’t accept the use of the internet and all related Social Medias. Later when we started using it (Kudumbashree made it mandatory), we were able to know the positive aspect of it. Being Gender RP we were supposed to take classes to the students who are updated with modern technology. Hence all of us started using it for getting the recent updates. In the similar manner, at an initial stage; girls uploading pictures in FB were rarely seen. It usually is a picture of flower or babies. If somebody exceeds the limit and upload a picture (rare of rare cases), society tends to blame and attack her. Now we can see that everyone is uploading pictures and society doesn’t know whom to attack. This is how girls should break all the stereotypes and come forward .i.e. they should break the shell of egg like how chick come out of Egg. It will take another 20 years for Kerala to witness full empowerment of women”.

Though many had this kind of open opinion, there were a few responses like

Participant 6:

“Many fight for their own needs and rights. Many have the thought that Feminist views include ruling men or considering women above men. It is not similar to that; it is all about equality and equal opportunity. For me, family matters more, and empowerment starts there. For a woman to be empowered she should take care of her family first and should be obedient towards her husband and in-laws. If she can prove to be a good housewife, empowerment takes place automatically”.

The participant was giving priority to family, and is appreciatiable. As the participant mentioned, empowerment should begin from the family, where one should get control over one’s own life. She was against the concept of current scenario of feminism where they misused the term for superseding men. All her replies were interrelated to these factors and were very much updated with women’s issues.

Participant 7:

“Empowerment includes a situation where women get complete protection from the society. She figured the situation of 6-month baby getting raped. Our world is going through a very bad and pathetic situation. Society should fight against all those devil minded people and should punish them. Kudumbashree provides us with awareness about whom to approach during all such situations and I’m obliged to be a part of it”.

These include few of the responses from the participants about how they define empowerment or what is an empowerment to them. Participant observation aided me to cover the uncovered aspect of reality in an enhanced way providing clarity. Repeated visits and in-depth conversations were done during the field work. As mentioned, empowerment can take place in different ways. It varies across context. There is no commonly accepted definition given to the concept of empowerment. In the similar manner the definition giving by the great authors across the country cannot be applied to the context of Kudumbashree women, for those who have all such small definitions for empowerment maintaining their traditional ethics, values and norms. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, sexual empowerment doesn’t seem to gain any value because all the participants believe in chastity.

Women are empowered comparatively due to the awareness classes that has been providing to them. None of them mentioned it in the process when they redefine empowerment, but frequent visits made it comprehend that all the basic awareness they have got is through such classes. It was also noticed during fieldwork that, there were a few, maybe 4-5 out of 38 who is claimed to be empowered outside where many factors like family, in-laws, society act as a barrier in coming forward. They were cooperative throughout fieldwork, but during the visits to their house and conversing with them habitually, make me think the other way around.

All these barriers linger in the society because of the stereotype established among all of us. Discussion about the concept always opens to wide discussion among the people, which leads to focus group discussion. The discussion was followed where one added up by quoting that:

Participant 8:

“The troubles for women tend to increase day by day and some people are inclined to blame women for their dressing style. We are supposed to actually look back to a primitive society where women were not wholly covered, later due to advancement and changes in the society, there were changes in dressing patterns too. And hence we should not held responsible for woman’s dressing for all such harassments and problems. When people’s attitude towards these entire stereotypes reduces, empowerment can ensue”.

During the visit to Pappad Company which is initiated by one of the Kudumbashree member, there emerges some different dynamics of empowerment. There were three women who are working under the company. It essentially happens as a group discussion. Their redefinition of empowerment includes;

Participant 9:

“A Woman to be empowered she should obey and respect her husband. Behaving the same helps in guiding our children. Respecting others shows one’s own dignity and self-respect, which is a characteristic of good women. If one does so, nobody will attack or blame her”.

Participant 10:

“I have an opinion that woman especially girls welcome some of the worst situations because of her overuse of mobile phones. It’s because they lack to have the aptitude to make a distinction between good and bad. This ability in oneself can make her empowered”.

All these women tend to be not so outspoken because they were not familiar to me. They were not the part of ayalkootam which has been selected. Since the pappad company was within the same geographical location, I just made an attempt to visit it. When asking detail about their family and personal thing after spending the whole day, it was noticed that, all these women are not ready to compromise their children’s life by getting them married earlier or by not providing

higher education. The generation is on the rise. It can be noticed by tracing the participant's parent's educational status, participant's educational status and their children's educational status.

Society is dynamic in nature and keeps on changing. It is the responsibility of all women to adapt all such changes and act consequently. All women are likely to be very active and cooperative throughout field work. They were very passionate about taking me throughout the field. Many friendly conversations were even considered as interviews consecutively to make sure that the participants are not affected by any diverging factors. My duty was always to make sure that the respondents were comfortable throughout the study. All women are likely to be sharing about all their achievement. Though the concept of empowerment varies from person to person, all the women tend to share their own perspective on empowerment.

If we noticed all these definitions, we can rely on the fact about how the conceptualization of empowerment varies across context. The actuality of how the discourse of egalitarianism have leads to gender inequality has taken away leading to empowerment was appreciable. All the participants tried to attempt the question of conceptualizing empowerment by the way they can, where some sounds repetitive. The environment of empowerment seems to be similar for all the respondents, which has an impact upon redefining the concept. But perspective of person varies which I tried to find throughout the study. It was also noticed that, the familial influence do play a major role on the subjects in redefining the concept. This was observed during a personal interview with the participants in the absence and presence of the family members. To all, empowerment includes getting control over something and reaching better situation. We can even say that, women tend to share their experience in which they lack or what they need. The positive thing to be noticed is, no one was making a comparison from the other.

Many fails to reach high because of unawareness and discrimination which one fail to get, being a citizen of India. Initiatives can bring changes, but it can happen only if all human being could stand together.

3.5 Kudumbahsree for empowerment

Though the conceptualization of empowerment varies across context, it was noticed that all women tend to be empowered in a number of or another way after their participation to Kudumbashree. In both units, the NHGs were encouraged to meet as many times as possible. The

election of women from among themselves as President of the NHG and Community Volunteers with specific responsibilities is a mandatory element of Kudumbashree. The volunteers are Community Health Volunteer, Community Infrastructure Volunteer and Community Income Generating Volunteer. The Community Health Volunteer is responsible for all the health related activities of the NHG like immunization, maternal care, child care, nutrition and propagation of ideas like cleanliness, hygiene, etc. The Community Infrastructure Volunteer is in charge of the basic infrastructure needs of the NHG such as housing, sanitation, drinking water, drainage, etc. These include few of the positions and Volunteers among the structure of Kudumbashree. Interviewing a few among them reveals that, even they fail complete form of empowerment. Though they have given complete freedom over everything, they still claim to be disempowered. They are only worried about the stereotype that is widespread in the society which makes the process of empowerment complicated. All these helps in enabling women to be in a responsible positions and assignment of responsibilities has marked a significant change in the gender role and significantly contributed in social capital formation and inclusive development.

I personally feel through the observation that Kudumbashree had made a drastic change in the lifecycle of those women who are living in the rural areas of Annamanada Panchayath. The two units comprise Shalabham and Sawparnika are positioned towards the location of Mambra. Though there were differences in terms of interaction among the units because of variation in number of years in experience, both the unit where unique in their own way. Above quotes includes few of the definition of empowerment among 38 participants. Many of the definition was similar in some or the other way.

The unit Sawparnika tends to be matured enough where it was noticeable by the way they respond to each and everything. They had a broad perspective on each and everything that has been asked, especially about the questions on empowerment due to 14 years of experience with in the Kudumbshree. They were even saying about the failure of some initiations which they have started because of unorganized structure. Now they are much more advanced in way of thinking and acting. The common way of response for redefining empowerment was on the scale of education, experience and courage.

When discussing about Shalabham unit, they were also active in all their unit activities. They way they handle situations and their behavior in all activities was different because of 6

years of experience. Their way of tackling questions was also different where they had lot to explain on each and everything. Their level of excitement towards everything is also praiseworthy. It was also noticed that all the women tend to be updated with all the current issues. The common response for redefining empowerment was based on protection, equality in opportunity, decision making, courage to overcome etc.

It's obvious from all these evidences that the Government of India has been incessantly formulating strategies and initiating processes, to bring women into the mainstream. Women constitute half of our country's population and unless their needs and interest and entirely taken into account, absolute empowerment cannot take place. The repeated redefinition of empowerment which was noticed was based on education. All the women in the field lack proper education and they feel it is due to this, they lack many things. They claim that:

“Education is the most important tool for socio-economic development which results in upliftment and social changes. They feel that education is massive, as a better-educated population leads to greater economic growth, though I corrected them by saying that, economic growth cannot bring full empowerment. They replied by stating that ‘Education not only opens up vast avenues and opportunities for growth but affects families and future generations directly’. It enables in providing awareness about their rights, duties and responsibilities in the society and hence a woman is said to be empowered if she can read and write. Yes, educations can be considered as an important component for empowerment. But education alone cannot make it. The Latin word 'Educa' means 'bringing out the potentialities of the individual for self-development (Praveen, 2008). Hence education can be considered as one among the most powerful instrument in bringing social change especially in the context of women's upliftment.

We should always consider the fact about how women started broadening their perspective towards everything. It is also important that such initiation made awareness to people from poor household which seem impossible with individual efforts. Participation alone can't make wide changes in the concept of empowerment. It also needs ones awareness, ability and capability. Many scholars opined that participation and empowerment are closely related; however this relationship at times may be complex and complicated. Not all the elements of empowerment are affected by all the elements of participation (Schwartz, 2004, pp. 301-310). It is also noticed that relationship between participation and empowerment can be erratic (York,

2000, pp. 225-234). All these give us the idea about how empowerment can be and how it varies across concepts. Perspectives of person also vary according to context. Besides this some people also think that empowerment can take place if they possess economic and financial aid. This study therefore gives the clarity about the concept.

3.6 Concluding remarks

This includes few of explanation of empowerment which is noticed during the field work. Empowerment should begin right from family. It is not something that should happen only in society. Mindset of the people also matters. It is the “personality and the expected behavior” that makes the women think that she can only indulge in only very few activities. The study among Kudumbashree women helps in having a broad understanding about the concept. It helps in making women empowered politically, socially, economically and culturally. All these forms of empowerment together make a woman fully empowered. Interestingly, husbands of a few of the participants and their family members involved in a few of the discussions on empowerment. They tend to redefine empowerment in their own way. Majority of the definition can be scaled on the basis of education, courage and cooperation. It can moreover be measured as the success of the organization where men are inclined to be aware of women’s rights and duties. The peer groups, to some extent are motivated by the participants. Though each participant tend to redefine their own version of empowerment, it was noticed that all the members in the both the unit has clear idea about the concept of empowerment. The variation in the concept which was noticed was mainly due to familial and societal barriers. In the similar manner, the definition given by the great scholars for empowerment in the Indian context cannot be studied in the context of Kudumbashree women, who believe in the concept of traditional norms and values.

And, yes it can be concluded by saying that there are various kinds of empowerment. It can vary with regard to context and form. Empowerment can take place only when a person is empowered socially, economically, politically and culturally. In a similar manner, the definition of empowerment can also vary across culture and context. Empowerment for a woman from western country will be different from that of middle-east version of empowerment. Our constitution says that, all citizens in India have a right to be treated equally irrespective of Caste, religion, gender and Sex. It is so called “expected behavior in the society”, makes the situation

more complicated and problematic. If the mindset and personality of the people are changed, problems can be reduced to some extent.

CHAPTER 4

Structural Inequalities within Kudumbashree

4.1 Introduction

“Caste and class became a catchy formulation to denote the social structure of Indian society. However, with its ideological ('cultural') commitment it soon merged itself into the formulation of caste in itself and employed the same idioms as Sanskritisation and Westernization to denote "social change in modern India" (Mukherjee, 1999, pp. 1759-1761).

The above quote mentions about the idioms, Westernization and Sanskritisation which has made drastic changes in the cultural structure of the country. Modern India, tend to be more advanced and adapted to changes, where the situation of women always remains questionable. Caste and Class based discrimination always remains as a major problem in the context of empowerment. Women being discriminated by stating the same and brings vulnerability to patriarchal society. The components like caste and class always prevails among the people and is hard to remove it. Caste is an age old social institution related with the life of Indians. It is a hereditary form of stratification and its membership is based on birth .i.e. it acquires ascriptive status. It is an endogamous unit. Its members follow a common traditional occupation and claim a common origin. Class refers to socio-economic positions based on employment rather than any subjective identity. It is more appropriate to mention that, caste includes social status and class includes economic status. It mainly includes an occupational involvement with professional classes and land owners at one end and non-land owing lower agriculturalist at another end.

Social stratification .i.e. structuring of society on the basis of status, occupation and employment is a common feature of human societies. In that sense caste and class are the form of social stratification which is prevailing in the society. The term caste possesses a Latin origin ‘castus’. The English word caste is derived from a Portuguese word ‘casta’ meaning race, breed or lineage. Thus caste became a persistent element in the life of all Indians, adapting itself to several new situations. Caste also cuts across religions. For instance, there are many incidents of religious conversion taking place in India, where their caste identity remains the same. The

influence of caste even today is noticeably obvious in political choices at the time of general elections from the panchayath to the parliament.

Since the origin of caste system, caste conflict has been a predictable phenomenon in all spheres of life. And it is obvious that the root cause is because of social inequality. It labels people into three category namely higher caste, lower caste and untouchables. The lower caste people are supposed to obey the higher-class people, where the higher caste people treat them inferior and show them their supremacy. Untouchables are the excluded category, where people fail to be in contact with them. They still dig graves, dispose of animal corpse, beat drums during funerals, use separate tumblers in tea stalls and the like. They are subjected to all sorts of discrimination, humiliation and exploitation. Later Indian society has entered to the process of industrialization, modernization and westernization during the course of time. Especially after independence, the consciousness among them found full appearance owing to the impact of social movements. This also helps in awakening of the marginalized groups. Spread of modern education and political awareness has also played a major role.

In India, a large division of the Scheduled Caste people works as agricultural laborers for their livelihood. A majority of the population live in extreme poverty, where they are barely able to feed their families. The children lack in getting proper education resulting in child labor. It is in this context, the significance of Kudumbashree has gained attention. The organization has remained sensitive with such inequalities and helps in involving to betterment of women by providing them a good status. The organization by following a holistic approach helps in the empowerment of women socially, economically, politically and culturally. Awareness classes being provided benefited in knowing about all schemes and policies. Their access to education and employment due to reservation has been a major reason for these changes. Involvement to politics also becomes an important reason which enabled these lower-class women to enjoy their rights and privileges guaranteed by the constitution.

Despite this, the problems and discrimination faced due to caste and class system in India remains the same. The situation of women tends to more pathetic and vulnerable. The study hence forth focuses upon the components like caste and class and its existence among rural women in Kudumbashree. The study tries to evaluate the existence of such discrimination and its consequences. Kudmbashree has its own classification of Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below

Poverty Line (BPL). Compliments and benefits are provided accordingly. Those who own a house, well, car, proper educational qualification to their children and income are considered to be in APL category and those who lack all these are categorized under BPL. Out of 38 women interviewed 14 APL, 23 BPL and 1 SC/ST were observed.

As mentioned in the introductory chapters, this study is also a critical evaluation of caste based discrimination and social exclusion that prevails among Kudumbashree members, though the main objective of the mission is to eradicate poverty and enhance women empowerment. The authors have mentioned the existence of structural inequalities and lack of awareness inside the organization. (Dr.K.Venugopalan, 2014), (Shihabudheen, 2013).

Caste and class based inequalities henceforth remains to prevail in our society. There is some other category of people labeled Scheduled caste and class. “In ancient times the Indian population was garmented by the Varna system. In the lowest rung of this system of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, falls the ‘fifth caste’ traditionally known as untouchables or outcastes. Today they are known as ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Scheduled Tribes’. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe are constitutional and not the sociological concepts. A caste can be specified as a scheduled caste only by the President of India, once specified, any inclusion or exclusion to the list can be made only through an act of the Parliament”(Chandra, 1981).

The term ‘Dalit’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘dal’, which means ‘torn asunder, broken, discriminated, disowned, subjugated and a victim of apartheid’ (thenewsminute.com, 2017). But for the dalit people, the real meaning of dalit is ‘The struggle for human rights’. Today in most of the Indian languages, the word ‘dalit’ represents the oppressed and downtrodden. For centuries, dalits and tribals have been socially suppressed, culturally neglected and economically exploited by the upper caste people. They are not only known as the ‘outcastes’ or ‘untouchables’ of the Indian society but are also considered as ‘useable, unapproachable, unshadowable and even unthinkable’. Concepts like “defilement, pollution, impurity and exclusion” are manifestly attributed to the dalits and tribals.

This includes the status occupied by the lower caste and class people in our country. The situation remaining the same, it is not appropriate to mention that the country has developed due to westernization. Scholars have also mentioned that, caste as a system is dead where, caste

among individuals are still flourishing (Shah, 2007, pp. 109-116). The following literature provides sufficient information about the prevalence of caste and class in the current society.

4.2 Review of literature

Caste and class includes the major components that are prevailing in the country since the time immemorial. Though as the result of Industrialization, urbanization and westernization changes has taken place, it is not or it cannot be completely moved. “The durability of the caste system cannot be underestimated. Its ritual basis may be knocked off but it reappears through politics” (Bhowmik, 1992). The study is not critiquing on the reservation system that is prevailing in our country, the system is a helping aid to many people across state and country. The fact is that, the same caste and class prevents many from coming forward, where the term equality is negotiated. Caste and class which is prevailing in our society brings a lot of advantages and disadvantages. People rather than taking advantage of it, tries to misuse it in the name of religious conflicts. The article by A.M Shah (2007) explains about the existence of caste and caste system in India in 21st century. The central question of the article includes how caste still exists among individual, where the caste system is already dead. The author mentions that, during the current century individual caste system is flourishing. “Even though, they would announce loudly that they do not believe in caste and would have actually broken caste boundaries and marriage and otherwise in personal life, they nevertheless support caste based discrimination” (Shah, 2007, pp. 109-116). It is because the author found out that, such reservation helps in upliftment of the lower caste people, thereby providing equality in opportunity. The article says that, certain category of people want such caste based discrimination for their upward mobility. But what matters is, are they occupying it properly. Government support to all such reservation is high, where misusing such opportunities is also evident.

The same advantage can at times become disadvantage to certain category of people. The article by Karin Kapadia (1998) explains about how caste, class and gender structure limits the economic opportunities for the rural women in Tamil Nadu. He conducted study and compared three villages in Tamil Nadu where he found the existence of all such discrimination. He added by stating that if the situation remains the same, poor will remain the poorest. Poverty in the country cannot be removed. Women though are making efforts to come out and fight, the

components like gender, caste and class prevents her from coming forward (Kapadia, 1998, pp. 3329-3335). Thus the article argues about discrimination prevailed in our country during 20th century. The major question here is, does it still prevail in the state? Is there any initiation by the government organization to fight against all such inequalities? It is obvious that our constitution guarantees equality to all its citizens. The mentality of the people towards all such biases and discriminations is slowly resurfing in new form with the help of new ideologies like Industrialization and westernization.

Kudumbashree with its institutional space of caste and class, few authors have commented about the prevalence of such discrimination inside the organization. They quote that “Women are being discriminated from getting power and status” (Shihabudheen, 2013). “Education level is also very low. The knowledge and awareness about women rights are not increased. (Dr. K. Venugopalan 2014). In a similar manner, politicalization also was present where members from ruling party made use of these meetings in order to meet the interest of their party”. Is it possible to happen in such an organization which is working for the people? Researcher hardly finds articles which mention such discrimination.

The fact about our country being modernized doesn't mean that we can take away the components like caste and class. The above article mentioned about the existence of structural inequalities in the 20th century. The article by Divya Vaid (2012) made an empirical analysis of caste and class in India. She conducted an ethnographic study to figure out the survival of caste and class based discrimination and the impact of changes brought as a part of modernization. The study finds out that, the influence of caste system has neither disappeared nor declined appreciably. Some element of all such biases always remains. Higher caste people always tend to get white collar jobs and lower caste people always involve in lower class jobs. SCs always face difficulty in gaining upward class mobility, although higher castes are not cushioned from the forces of downward mobility (Vaid, 2012). It was always difficult for the lower caste or lower class to come up in social strata. It is obvious from this article of 21st century that, structural inequalities still prevail.

There are even more articles which portray the existence of caste and class discrimination. 21st century being the time of progress and such practices are still prevailing; the situation would be much more worsening during 19th and 20th century. The article by Atyachar

Virodh Samiti (1979) gives an authentic explanation of how higher caste people still exploit the lower caste people. It gives a vivid picture about the riots in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra which happened in 1978. The existence of caste and class was very much evident where lower caste people tend to be always exploited by the higher caste. They are supposed to remain quiet. There were even people who have been attacked and murdered as the result. India being a country of unity and diversity, all these can impact its pride and prosperity (Samiti, 1979, pp. 845-852). The similar incidents were also noticed in Calcutta (Prabir, 1993, p. 2686), where the same lower caste people are being attacked and murdered.

Scholars above have mentioned that modernization has brought about changes in the scenario of our country. Hence the existences of class and caste based discrimination are hardly found.

“...maintaining that what exists in India is caste in class, not caste per se or caste and class” (Mukherjee, 1999).

Caste always leads to class based discrimination, though class belongs to economic status and caste includes the social status of the individual. Brahmins always involve in religious activities and higher level jobs and lower caste people are supposed to treat them superior. The author mentions that if the scenario remains likewise, poor will become poorer and rich will become richer. Downward mobility is possible for Brahmins under some circumstances, where upward mobility for lower caste people is unimaginable.

While discussing in the context of Kerala, the state has observed with same sort of discrimination. Higher caste people .i.e. Brahmins and Nair's always maintain the higher position in terms of status. Educational status and job opportunities also remain the same. Below the grade includes the Christians (Syrian Catholics). The backwards classes especially middle class Hindu (Ezhvava), Muslims, Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes always fail in getting equal status. Education has brought about few changes where it was again the same old higher caste people who benefited the most comparing to the other people (Sivanandan, 1979).

It is therefore revealed from the above articles that, removing the element of caste and class from the mentality of Indian people is very much difficult. How the organization like Kudumbashree plays a role in eradicating such components makes it unique. Researcher found

insufficient articles which portrays the existence of caste and class based discrimination among Kudumbashree and hence the conclusion has been given is based on the fieldwork experience of the researcher. As mentioned in the constitution that no citizen in the country should be discriminated on the base of caste, creed, gender and sex. And hence it is the duty to all individuals to keep it up, though hardly people follows it. With mentioning of the existing literature which showcases the situation of the country, now my experiences based on components of caste and class with the context of Kudumbashree are observed.

4.3 Responses of the participants

Existing literature provides us the understanding about the existence of the structural inequalities like caste and class in India. The organization was noticed to be working in a proper manner without any kind of discrimination. The people work, cooperate, discuss and involve in all the activities without any biases. The following field experiences shares about how the study being conducted tracing the existence of such structural inequalities. I tried involving into participant observation and also into both formal and informal conversations.

Below includes few of the responses collected from participants during formal and informal conversation with them and with their family members in order to cover the themes which is coming under the objectives.

Participant 1:

“I am the chairperson of Annamanada Panchayath and I believe that, if caste and class based discrimination prevails among Kudumbashree there is no possibility and chances of me being into this position. I was elected by the common people of this panchayath and not through any sort of influences. I didn't find any issues till today of being ST and belonging to poor economic background. My family situation is pathetic, where I undergone lots of family problems throughout my life time. Being in to Kudumbashree, helps me to forget all my worries and also enables me in doing service to society, helping the people and also updating me with current reality which benefits me to fight for my own sake and also for the welfare of the society”.

It was noticed that, the participant being very humble, polite and patient throughout the interview. She is very active in all the activities of the panchayath, where at the same time; it was observed by comparing to the other participants discussed in the above chapters that, she was not so talkative and outspoken. It may be probably because of her family problems of being a divorcee though she was not interested in sharing her personal details to anyone. It is of importance that, though the organization is very much dedicated to family structure, the participant felt divorce as an act of breaking from patriarchal control. Her courage to overcome all the difficulties in life was praiseworthy. A change that has taken place in her life after becoming a Kudumbashree member is also noteworthy. She has influenced many people in her life.

The article *Mobility towards Work and Politics for Women in Kerala State, India: A View from the Histories of Gender and Space* by J. Devika and Binitha V. Thampi conducts an explanatory study about caste and class in Kerala. They explain about how a woman from Dalit, SC and St Category has gained value and respect in the society after being into Kudumbashree. She added up that, initially the participation of Dalit women was very less were later they broke those shells and came out of it. The authors quoted one of the most successful women panchayath presidents in Kerala from Alappuzha district:

“I have been successful for three consecutive terms and now everyone knows me. Though my husband is a local leader of the DYFI [Democratic Youth Federation of India], he is known after me. My children too get this recognition” (Thampi. J. Devika, 2011, pp. 1147-1175).

There were many cases which were explained in a similar manner where many view their successful career as Panchyath President. This showcases that the situation of women is getting better comparatively though it doesn't reached to an extent.

I tried involving in to the questions based on the prevalence of caste and class base discrimination existing among Kudumbashree as this study is also a critical evaluation of two authors who mentions about the existence of caste and class-based discrimination that is prevailing among Kudumbashree. Covering all such aspects was done mainly through the informal conversations with the participants, than having a formal interview

Participant 2:

“One of our unit members is a ward councilor and she happened to be in that position only because of being a Kudumbashree member. There is a separate vacancy kept for Kudumbashree women. It cannot be occupied by any other woman who is not from Kudumbashree. This showcases how the organization enables women to involve into politics. Many of us happen to know more about politics only after being into the organization. Hence we got a ward woman who can represent us in the panchayath and helps in finding a solution for all our problems. Hence I can't accept the fact about having caste and class based discrimination in Kudumbashree”.

While having discussion about the good and bad about the organization, the discussion regarding the existence of caste and caste based discrimination also emerges up. A few offended by stating that, they didn't feel such discrimination as observed by the researcher in the literature review. Beside that the election and appointment of the responsibility was based on majority voting during election. In the similar manner other mentioned that:

Participant 3:

“Among NHGs (ayalkootam) the membership is based on the eligibility and willingness of the unit members. In some cases eligibility is majorly taken in to concern, especially in matters concerning accounts. The person with B.com qualification will able to calculate and tally it better than a person from non accounting background. The same happens for the election among higher authorities. Eligibility is majorly taken into concern. Government and politics do play a major role but it doesn't mean that lower caste people are denied from getting post”.

She added by saying that as per our discussion if there was existence of caste and class based discrimination, many of us wouldn't have got this opportunity. All things have positives and negatives. It is like two sides of the coin. It is our duty to consider the best. It is just that, those authors have failed to cover all other aspects of Kudumbashree. She also added that, hiding

the 80% of good things which Kudumbashree has done, few people are trying to bring the 20% which everyone hardly notices.

It is obvious that the political participation of women has increased majorly after ones involvement to Kudumbashree. The panchayath has separate seats allotted for Kudumbashree women. Many authors have praised the same on articles related to Kudumbashree. “Yes it is obvious and noteworthy to mention that the rapidly changing urban scenario seems to have important implications for gendering governance in Kerala. Many scholars and feminist in the state have stated the changes that have taken place, for women’s involvement to local bodies. State always makes sure that women tend to make use of all the opportunities granted to them. The 33% reservation offered to women in local bodies has certainly provided women in Kerala with a major opportunity to enter politics and public life since the mid-1990s” (Devika.J, 2012, pp. 76-83).

Besides this, few preferences and group formation among the unit members based on their religion was noticed. It is very surtile, where the respondents themselves are unaware about its existence. It was just noticed during the deep observation among the unit members during their discussion and sharing of experiences. The belongingness of being to same parish (church) was common among these people. This was noticed among the new unit. It was also evident by the below incident:

“There was a minor accident which has happened to one of the respondent’s husband. News was suddenly passed to all these groups members (people belonging to same parish) who are very close and they approached the victim initially for financial and other supports”.

There was no such discrimination or biases happening during the meetings, discussion, acquiring benefits etc. A few are connected personally and were having special bonds which was not noticed during elections. I am able to say this because of my presence during one of the election, where eligibility and willingness to stand was the major concern. In both the units, it was noticed that all the unit members were considered and treated as a family.

Sawparnika unit being very old, their involvement and participation towards all activities was unique. The positions of President and Secretary was given to the youngsters and was mentioned by one of the participant that, “we all are aged people and it is always better for the

younger generation to occupy the seats which results in getting new and innovative ideas which makes our unit creative”. It will also enable in giving opportunity to the entire unit members which provides equality in opportunity. They always make sure that, all members are taking some or the other post, than one person remaining in the same positions. Shalabham unit also went through same processes. The only difference found here was, it was not only the youngsters who are taking up the positions but everyone. The opportunity was systematically passing from one to another, to make sure that, all are taking up opportunities.

Caste being an important element peculiar to Indian social system, there are many sorts of conflicts and problems, emerges as the result. As mentioned earlier, it was said that as the result of westernization and industrialization drastic changes has taken place in the mind set Indian people. But saddest part is the in some part of the country it still exists, as mentioned in the literature study among the rural areas of Tamil Nadu (Kapadia, 1998). The question of, whether it is practiced among the organization like Kudumbashree is found to be negative. I also tried involving to discussion about this topic to higher authorities. One of them responded in manner that Kudumbashree as an organization has a Communist (LDF) origin. Hence majority of the members were found to be of the same party. The congress party (UDF) has a parallel organization named “JANASREE”. She quoted:

Participant 4:

“I am not in to any party. As mentioned the organization has a communist origin, all its members are found to be the member of that particular party. As far as the implementation of schemes and policies benefits the normal people, nobody is bothering who the authority is. The organization always made a lot of changes for the upliftment of rural women. Yes, I do accept the fact that, majority of them belongs to the same party. The reason was either due to communist origin or the availability of members. But I won’t accept the fact about existence of Caste, Class and Political discrimination”.

She continued by stating that all that matters is the development and upliftment of the people. If the higher authority is doing it, then the organization should be praised. In the similar manner it is obvious and understandable that, if there is a political influence, it is because the

organizational formation. Though the organization is run by a particular party, all its benefits are equally divided to all the common people and to the needy. Hence it is also understandable that, the party members want their own person to be in the position so that all the implementation can be passed through them and everything can be mutually understandable which will in turn benefits the functioning of the organization. Though it does have such influence by politics, unless the common people are not affected by this, nobody can complaint about it.

The political influences which are observed here is not much affected to the common people as structural inequalities are considered. But it is not appropriate to mention that, caste and class has nothing to do with Indian politics, it does have a major role. The article in Caste and Class in India by Divya Vaid which is mentioned above literature concludes by opining up the following question:

“.....this could be extended, for example, to a more in-depth study on the social basis of electoral voting, the study of key factors influencing political representation, or concerning the politics of reservations—all areas where both caste and class background have a major role to play” (Vaid, 2012, pp. 395-422).

This makes it evident that politics has a few things to do with caste and class. Hence the researcher also tries to cover the economic and caste status of the leaders and higher authorities. Dalit women’s participation was also seen and all the respondents belong to rural part of the Kerala, where many of the leaders reside there. There was no difference in the economic status which would be appropriate to mention that class based discrimination on the basis employment and status were hardly seen. All those who share their experiences were unaware of politics and party at an initial stage, it was Kudumbashree who provides them such opportunity. It provides people with opportunities and knowledge in order to attain equal opportunities and to gain women empowerment.

Participant 5:

I belong to a poor class family and I went behind all the sectors for the BPL (Below Poverty Line) card, and was refused by everyone. I wanted to acquire the card in order to get some sort of economic relief for my family. It was through Ashryaya and Kudumbashree I got the card few months before”.

Above mentioned case explains the situation of how the organization enables women in getting all the opportunities and benefits provided to them by the government. It not only provides aid but also helps in acquiring it. As the coin has two sides in it, everything has its own positives and negatives. Women involvement to all such sectors enabled her in developing skills, being knowledgeable and cunning. Women being labeled as “Second Sex” and being treated inferior, many take an advantage of it and consider her for granted. There are cases where women are being trying maximum to come out of such stereotype. Besides this, women are even blamed for many things which she is not aware of. The below explains the interview by a highly success full women leader which is taken from the article “Beyond Feminine Public Altruism: Women Leaders in Kerala's Urban Bodies” by J Devika and Binitha V Thambi.

“Now I do know that I am absolutely necessary for the survival of my party here; so I am hardly challenged directly. But one must always remain alert. I have always been careful to follow the rules myself and so no one has yet got a chance to attack me personally. Now, recently, I had been abroad for 14 days. I took permission from the government through proper channels but did not hand over charge to the vice-chairman, because I was coming back within 15 days (and there is no rule that I should do this unless I exceeded the 15-day limit). Now, some of the hostile press caught hold of this and kicked up a fuss - that I had left for a long period without handing over charge to the vice-chairman. They apparently asked him, who told them that I was away - but he did not bother to tell them that I would be back really soon. Now, that is the kind of hidden missile aimed at a successful woman! It looks minor but can damage our moral authority to take to task the shirkers and rule-breakers in the municipal office! I took it in my stride, though. As soon as I came back I clarified my position, but when asked why the vice-chairman did not reveal this, I did not take the bait! They, of course, wanted to probe whether there is a hidden power struggle in the municipality. But I wanted to convey a message to this vice-chairman, someone from my own side, that I did see his game only too well and that I knew how to put him in his place. And so I responded, 'the vice-chairman is on the best terms with me; if your intention is to provoke us, it will not work. He committed a mistake perhaps, and that is probably because he is not very familiar with rules generally, and the Municipal Ac...’ (Devika.J, 2012).

The complete dialogue was mentioned by the researcher to showcase the scenario of the situation of women. Currently women tend to visualize what is wrong and what is right because of the awareness that has been provided to them. Indian being a patriarchal society, removing such stereotypes is not an easy task. Women should keep fighting for the changes and equality.

4.4 Kudumbashree on structural inequalities

Kudumbashree consist of women form all caste and class. They reside in rural and urban areas of the state. Most of the respondents belong to poor economic strata of the society. Even then the political participation of women was seen high. They didn't feel any sort of rejection from the society. Caste and class was not at all a major concern. A few of the respondents were not interested in politics because of their family situation. It was in them where the whole family depends on and hence time constrains plays a major role. Researcher does felt for a few women staying away from politics because of the family norms and values. It would be unfair to mention that these people are not aware of such participation. The familial and societal role does play a major role here. Statistics among the respondents reveals that majority of them belongs to lower class family. There was a ward councilor among the respondents. The major gossip among the people in the locality claims;

“If there is a Kudumbashree women representation, there is no possibility for any other women to win”.

This can be due to several reasons. But it was noticed that, the interaction and socialization of the participants was very high and is very much known to the public. They were very much active in interaction in public places like bus stand, canteen, meetings etc... They were known by many. Despite this, during the bus journey to other panchayaths, the researcher was noticed by others because of participant's familiarity and popularity. The article by Sudhakharan in 2015 observing the success of Kudumbashree women in politics stated that:

"They are aware of the problems at the grassroots and moreover, they are the ones whom the people contact first whenever there is a local issue. Also, since they are regularly in touch with the local bodies, they are aware of various development and welfare schemes, and once they become the members of the local government, they will be able to do more for the society” (P.Sudhakaran, 2015).

This helps in analyzing the role played by women in politics. Looking at the major observation during the study, it was noticed that the organization is running successfully with the core objective of women empowerment. Hence it can be concluded that the existence of structural inequalities like caste and class was unnoticed during the field work.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

In response to the comments, articulated by the authors (K.Venugopalan, 2014), (Shihabudheen, 2013), such discrimination was not observed during the fieldwork. I feel that the occurrence of such discrimination is very less in Kudumbashree. And hence the presence of all such biases was very minor, at least among the units which was taken for the study. It doesn't mean that the above authors have only mentioned about such discrimination, the authors has also discussed about the positive side of the organization. Major drawback here is that, they concluded their articles by stating the changes that should be done in order to avoid such discrimination.

Caste and class always prevail among the mindset of the people. It is in about how we handle it. It is that we should not look at caste as a 'new avatar' as scholars like Srinivas have recently proclaimed. "Class structure has cut across the caste hierarchy, forming new alliances and antagonisms. Indeed, it is in the process of withering away of a phenomenon along with the march of history or remains as an atavism, like, the distinction between the Jews and the Gentile, the Hindus and the Muslims. Yet, it is propped up, for their own gain, by the politicians and a brand of social scientists. Today, in India, caste in class depicts the reality and not caste per se or caste and class" (Mukherjee, 1999, pp. 1759-1761). Hence caste and class remains to prevail in Indian society where it is the duty of the entire individual to benefit the advantages in a proper way than bringing conflict to the society. Despite the existence of a few influences based on religion and personal bond, the existence any sort of discrimination and biases inside the organization was unnoticed. It is, in fact through the organization many come to know about the schemes and benefits. There was a case of a family, who were able to gain the BPL (Below Poverty Line) card only because of the support from the organization. Hence the organization is much fruitful to the people out there.

Caste and class always remain to occur in all states including Kerala, the state which shares the high literacy rate. We should always try to consider the positive side of it than going behind the negatives thereby producing problems.

CHAPTER 5

Re-Engaging Patriarchy: Decision Making Capability and Kudumbashree

5.1 Introduction

Empowerment refers to a situation of enhancing social, economic, political and legal power for the women, where one can live a life of self-worth, respect and dignity. They often have troubles to get equal treatment. Women infrequently enjoy the wide spectrum of freedom and rights granted by the constitution and other legal provisions. In a male dominated society, they face plethora of barriers in the form of discrimination, exploitation, sexual harassment, violence and the like in every sphere of life with different intensities. All these create confusion and drawbacks in the process of empowerment. As mentioned, women empowerment includes the situation of empowering women which enables in solving all problems faced by women of being labeled as “Second Sex”. Role in decision making is still compromised considerably. Empowerment should always begin from family, where women tend to get control over their own lives, control in decision making, control over children’s education, marriage etc.

Many studies have been conducted for women empowerment and lots of problems have been figured, still the situation of women remains the same. There are lots of initiations by the governmental and non-governmental organization for women empowerment, where there are some barriers which stop them by gaining empowerment to its full strength. Patriarchy can be considered as an important challenge to women empowerment. As mentioned earlier empowerment includes something that has to be initiated from one’s own household. The word patriarchy has a Greek origin which means “the rule of the father” which includes father’s authority over their family members (LeGates, 2001). Different scholars across disciplines have defined it in a different way, both positive and negative. At ancient times the term was mostly used in order to showcase the fathers’ control and responsibility over the family where, the term tends to be widely used now ending up in many problems. Women are more involved in domestic work which doesn’t mean that she has to do that work alone. There are even cases where women are suppresses, subjected to domestic violence, sexual harassment in the name of patriarchy (Chowdhury F. D., 2009, pp. 599-622). Patriarchy always includes the process of

male domination or men's control over women. It can even be proved by the statement of many authors. Lerner argues that patriarchal family is the basic unit of organization (Lerner G. , 1986). The existence of male domination over women was noticed since 1970s and family encourages its members to conform the sexually differentiated roles and maintain women's inferior position (Millett, 1970). We can even say that, society and every avenue of power within the society is entirely in male hands. This situation tends to affect the female population resulting all the negative consequences and unequal opportunity.

Empowerment should always begin from family, where women get control over their own lives, control in decision making, control over children's education, children's marriage etc. But currently marriages become the institution by which women's unpaid work is appropriated by her husband and in-laws. Everything happens inside house are taken for granted, where the girls have to remain silent and obey everything. There is no where written in the constitution that women should be treated inferior. All citizens in India should be treated equally irrespective of caste, gender, sex and religion guaranteed by Indian Constitution. It is the strong Patriarchal norms and values in the society claims the women to be inferior to men. We can even say that the patriarchal attitudes of society create favorable conditions for women's oppression wherein women start thinking of themselves as inferior to men. This is a dangerous situation as it reduces women's self confidence and self respect. Women should always start thinking about equality and dignity where they tend to get a life of self worth and dignity. It needs the support of various organizations as well as individuals to operate successfully. Gerda Lerner argues that women are even more responsible for the rise and spread of patriarchy. She believes that individuals especially women are lured by a patriarchal society to become the agents of their own suppression when they are rewarded for adhering to patriarchal norms.

“This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial to women of knowledge of their history, the dividing of women, discrimination in access to economic resources and political power and by awarding class privileges to conforming women” (Lerner G. , 1988)

Lerner thus concluded that patriarchy can only function with the cooperation of women and if women withdraw their support, the structure will collapse automatically. Patriarchy is not something that can be easily removed or withdrawn. All cultures consider women as inferior to

men. This line of thought has continued till date when women are paid lower wages for the same work as their male counterparts (Zeenat, 2012).

As now we understood how patriarchy is viewed by the society and its components now we focus upon how women empowerment contests patriarchy through reconfiguration of the decision making process. Decision making is often understood as the product of stable cognitive processes, for example, as driven by cognitive representations of utility (Kahneman D, 1979, pp. 263-292). As mentioned earlier empowerment is something which has to begin from family. At household, a woman has the equal right to take decisions. But in reality it is not happening so. In traditional patriarchal family, the eldest male is the head of the family and he is supposed to take all decisions. Women were appreciated only for their roles as the mother of male children. This is how our country functions and hence women empowerment always remains a challenge. The situation of women in 21st century possesses lot of changes when compared to primitive ancient society. Lots of initiation by governmental and non-governmental organizations has emerged. As a result women started knowing about their rights and duties .i.e. awareness about schemes and policies has been increased.

In the article “Why Patriarchy” by Steven Goldberg the great sociologist Margret Mead has mentioned:

“Men may cook, or weave, or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations for men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less import” (Goldberg, 2008, pp. 13-21).

Activities which women are doing are considered to be wives domain. It is their duty and it is for that, they are for. Few mentioned the term about ‘unpaid labor’. Hence the concept role, power and position came into existence. Many thinks that power has lot to do in society and is dominant over others. Many also understand power to mean one’s ability to take independent decisions on personal matters like education, career, marriage, fertility, divorce, remarriage, etc. For women empowerment, it should begin with the power of women to take decision over everything inside house. Hence this study indicates about decision making capability among

women that has changed after her involvement to Kudumbashree. Participant observation helps me to visualize the role and position played by the women inside and outside the family.

5.2 Dynamics of changing Decision-Making process

“According to Hartmann the key elements of patriarchy include: heterosexual marriage; female childbearing and house work; women's economic dependence on men; the state; and different institutions which are based on social relations among men, such as clubs, sports, unions, professions, universities, churches, corporations and armies. She thinks that dominance and submission are learned from the family” (Hartmann, 1979, p. 207). The authors have mentioned about how family is the main cite of oppression for females, but it is not always necessary that family or marriage always bring oppression to female, it is the security for women in Bangladesh. The incidence of rape and sexual harassment is increasing in Bangladesh; and child marriages take place to protect girls from rape and sexual harassment (Chowdhury F. D., 2004). The above two articles explains about the importance of patriarchy, marriage and family. All these three concepts have positives and negatives. It is in the hand of people and society about how we consider and treat the concept.

Women form nearly half the population of India and yet theirs is the only voice not heard in the corridors of power (1991, pp. 2736-2737). Women are always marginalized to be voiceless and they are not supposed to raise voice in the forum. Empowerment begins at home, where a woman gets control over her own lives and livelihood. In that case, decision making plays a major role. Though there are lot more schemes and policies for women empowerment, it always gets scant attention. The same is observed in the parliament where women's participation is rarely seen, though our constitution is unbiased for gender issues. The article Women's participation in Decision Making (1991) explains that participation of women in parliament and politics are rarely seen, where they fail to come forward due to lack of information and lack of courage. They often fail to take decision by their own. Decision making capability plays a major role in women empowerment. The author concludes by stating that women should be provided with better information and it should be made compulsory that 30 % of seats guaranteed by the constitution should be occupied by women only. This article mentions about decision making capability of women in politics and society. When explaining in the context of Kudumbashree it was noticed that women takes up the role into politics. The statistics was poor at the initial stage,

where there are much changes noticed now. It is even more appropriate to mention that, rural women's involvement into politics has emerged mainly because of Kudumbashree in Kerala (Santosh, 2014).

There are many stereotype prevailed in the society which doesn't allow women to be a part of anything that is occurring in the society. As mentioned earlier; decision making is often understood as the product of stable cognitive processes, for example, as driven by cognitive representations of utility (Kahneman D, 1979, pp. 263-292). But the dilemma is that many authors have defined decision making in their own way. Decision making can be shaped by more situation-sensitive factors, such as emotions (Lerner J.S., 2000, pp. 473- 493) (Loewenstein G.F., 2001, pp. 267-286). All these can be included as the stereotype behind everything. The article by Steele, Priyanka B. Carr and Claude M (2010) explains about the stereotype threat among women. The study was conducted by focusing two aspects which includes the components of gender differences .i.e. loss averse and risk averse. The author states that many factors are likely to contribute to this disparity. The authors states about how gender stereotype still prevails, which reduces the decision making capability of women. Women are more loss averse and risk averse than men and are not as adept at mathematics and finance as men, can be an important cause of underrepresentation of women in these fields. If a woman tries to come up in these fields which are described to be for men, such stereotype can be minimized. The author concludes by stating that stereotype threat can have diverse effect in the decision making capability of women (Steele, 2010, pp. 1411-1416).

Organizations like Kudumbashree always enable in providing awareness to rural women which helps in bettering their status. Awareness to a large extends can results in women empowerment. Scholars across disciplines have quoted the same. The article by Judith C. Daniluk and Al Herman (1984) explains about how awareness amongst women helps in increasing the decision making capability among women. The study explains about how they practice change in behavior among women who experience difficulty in deciding whether to have children or not. They were obliged to the traditional norms and were ready to accept their husband's decision. 20 hours of workshop was provided which showcases the drastic change in the mindset of those women. In the similar manner another article by Petra Stein, Sebastian Willen and Monika Pavetic (2014) conducted a study to determine role of both the partners in the

fertility decision making. The study was conducted keeping the trivariate distribution consisting of the male and the female partner's fertility intentions, as well as the joint generative decisions. The study found out that the male partners tend to have greater influence because of the traditional norms and values where female tend to possess greater overall parameters because of VETO power in the couple's final decision. This article explains about how VETO act plays a dominant role in the decision making power of women. Hence, there are sufficient changes happening because of such awareness classes.

Decision made by both the gender across concepts and situations also differs. Women are always considered to be liberal, polite and humble when compared to men. They always adjust and adapt to the situation. The article by Donald R. Songer and Kelley A. Crews-Meyer (2000) showcases the difference in behaviors of both the judges while making the final judgments. It was noticed that women tend to be liberal in making judgments regarding death penalty. In a similar manner, it was also noticed that women's presence in the court also makes changes than a men to men judgments. It is evident from the article about the mind set of women judges. It is even applicable to the entire species of women. But we should always consider the fact that, the same advantages to women should not be misused which leads to harassments, violence and abuse. It is always the stereotype that is prevailing in our society maintains women's inferior status as mentioned in the article by different scholars (Steele, 2010, pp. 1411-1416). It is said that women can't break the shell and come out, unless she started to speak out. The article by Veena Ravi Kumar (2002) explains about the participation of women to politics. She mentions about how the women should start fighting for one's own rights. "In order to be gender-equal in decision-making women will have to be far more participatory in creating ideologies, structures and institutions. They will need to link citizenship with legal rights, while demystifying patriarchal law and deconstructing gender-oppressive structures" (Kumar, 2002, pp. 106-114). The article by Caroline Moser and Annalise Moser (2005) explains about how gender mainstreaming was prioritized across world in order to bring gender equality. Covering the census the article reveals that, there is no where we can find the initiation being failure. Progress, adaption and implementation of policies were very much successful, which explains that once something is enforced and is made compulsory, everyone will start following it irrespective of the stereotype prevailed in the society.

5.3 Experiences of the participants (Decision Making)

In our male dominated society where women lack to make decision independently, organization like Kudumbashree helps in uplifting women which becomes a challenge to patriarchy. Hence empowerment helps in redefining patriarchy.

Patriarchy includes the system of society or government in which father or any oldest member of the family will become the head of the family and the descent is through male line. We think the situation of women getting better resulting in women empowerment. But the complete empowerment is hardly seen. The news report recently in The Hindu can be the example. The news states the following:

“Marriage is a career stopper for the majority of Indian women and this cultural abhorrence towards women working is a not-so-subtle way of ensuring that the escape routes out of a marriage are minimized, if not entirely closed. India’s female workforce participation is among the lowest in the world. The Economic Survey 2017-18 revealed that women comprise only 24% of the Indian workforce. In fact, as India grows economically, the number of women in workplaces is declining steadily. This, even though the enrolment of girls in higher education courses is growing steadily — to 46% in 2014 from 39% in 2007” (Venugopal, 2018).

Interviewing the participants was primarily during NHG meetings, group discussions, and house visit. Initially the women were unaware of their rights and duties. But after conducting awareness classes by the organization on a monthly basis woman started to understand and learn how to implement their rights and duties whenever needed. Women were bold enough to share their views. Decisions in home were taken on a neutral basis where both the members have equal opportunity in making decisions. House hold decisions regarding the children were taken by women. In many cases it was women who were taking care of the whole family where the entire responsibility of the house rests in her hands. Also, in some cases they were the major source of income.

In some family we can even notice the new dynamics of economy which helps in giving women a new status. There was a case where husband left his job to join his wife for her business. In the above mentioned case the response of the participant includes the following:

Participant 1:

“I am very much happy to be a member of Kudumbashree. I am from a lower class family and the situation of my house during my marriage was pathetic. I realized later that, my husband’s income alone can’t make a difference in our situation. Later I happened to know about the organization which provides loans and economic aid for women. After I joined the organization, I took an independent loan and started a Pappad Company. I have 3 staffs working under me now. My business started growing where my husband who was working in a bakery left that job and started helping me for marketing. Not only that Kudumbashree saw the in-built talent in me where I have a talent for script writing and acting. I have a skit group formed by me which is very much famous in our locality. We even reached state level. All I am now is through Kudumbashree”

During the interview it was noticed that the participant was very determined and even more knowledgeable about women empowerment. Later, during the visit to her house, it was noticed that she was the one who takes care of everything in the family. It doesn’t mean that she overrules her husband; it is that husband thinks she can take better decision in everything since she is exposed to many things than him especially in the case of children’s education and business. All the initiations by Kudumbashree were very helpful to women and also enable in exposure of women in all the spheres of life which leads to women empowerment.

Women’s role in decision making has gained drastic changes recently. There were families where women go out for daily wages and husband takes care of agricultural grounds and stay back home. All these women tend to be so hard working that their daily work starts at 3:00 am in the morning. They even tend to travel distant places alone, where the family members are comfortable with it. In some case women takes the role of both the husband and wife and act accordingly.

Participant 2:

“There was a case of a woman who is taking care of the whole family. Her husband can’t take up the heavy works because of his bad health condition. She has to take care of the whole family which includes her mother –in – law and husband’s brother. She has to manage many things at a time. She works on daily wages, does tailoring, household works at many places etc. The responsibility of whole family rests on her. She uses to take loan form Kudumbashree for household purposes. Here we can see the dynamics of decision making process”.

It was personally felt that, the participant was very busy taking care of everything in house where I have to repeatedly visit her house to have a proper conversation. She was engaging to multiple activities when comparing to all other participants. I was shocked to see the activities which she was involving into. Her daily routine starts at 3:00 am and ends at 10:00 pm which was quite surprising. She even has cattle in her house where she uses to sell milk in her neighborhood.

As mentioned women empowerment should begin from the family, it is not necessary that it should stick in family alone; it has to be taken out to all sphere of society. If she gets the opportunities in her home, she will also receive the same in the society.

There was a case of the local councilor. Repeated conversations and participant analysis helps in understanding and valuating the level of heights she reached after her involvement to the organization. She claims that:

Participant 3:

“I have got all the freedom from my family. I am a ward member and use to travel a lot for my panchayath. There are even situations where I even can’t cook food for my family. I have 2 sons, both of them knows how to cook. I always make sure that they can do everything even when I’m not around. Beside that it is not necessary that women should alone cook. This will enable in respecting women especially mother and their wives in future. All the decisions in the house are taken by me, it not only means that it is an independent decision but also a

combined decision of my husband. I always have a feeling that woman empowerment has not reached to its maximum. In our male dominated society, women always fail to speak in a forum, especially during our panchayath meetings. It is the duty of all the ward members to make decisions. It doesn't happen so. I use to talk open where nobody considers me as a girl. I believe that, it is so called "expected behavior" in the society which makes women to do so. I think we should try to be bold enough to open our mind and involve in everything. So that society will start hearing to us".

It is very much evident from the above statement that women are trying to come up and drastic changes have taken place in the mind set of people. It is same with the many of the participants where they are getting complete freedom over everything and decision making capability is also seen high. The same participants remain silent in the society fearing the comments they will receive when they become outspoken.

"A typical rural women's self-help group is a good example of capacity building for prospective entrepreneurs. Its aims to include enabling members with educational or industrial or entrepreneurial background to become self-dependent and self-reliant by developing and enhancing the decision-making capacity of members and instilling in them the strength and confidence for solving their problems" (Sulaiman, 2014, pp. 1-7). This says about how decision making capability has enabled women in changing their view about society and resulted in her development. The author mentions about the instances of women who come up in life as a result. There was another case who wasn't active like other respondents. She was regular to all meeting. Personal interaction with the participant made me to feel that, though she is not outspoken, she has the capability to do everything on her own. Her husband and children are working abroad. She stays in the house and takes care of everything. She is the one who left both her children abroad through her savings and money taken from Kudumbashree. She mentions that:

Participant 4:

"I may be different from others. You won't get the same answer as you expect from me. I am a person who always gives priority to my husband to

decide everything. There is no independent decision taken by me. I want him to be superior over me and I respect him”.

I was not even expecting any particular answer from the participant. In fact, she was similar to me just like the other participants. Through repeated visits and in-depth conversations, it made me to realize that, even though she is not so outspoken, she is the one who is taking over all the decisions in the family irrespective of the claims she makes.

Decision making capability mainly includes the situation for women to get equal opportunity to take decision in everything including decision about one’s own life. It gives her satisfactory position in her life. There was another instance where during the discussion with the participant, her partner went inside the kitchen to make tea. It is not that women was treating her husband inferior, it is just that, for them “*adhidigale salkkarikkanam*”(treating the guests), is a basic thing which one is suppose to do. No matter if women is not around. All the members in the family have equal responsibility to do that. Since the housewife is involved into something and can’t do that, husband started doing it. The participant was feeling proud when she shares the income generation of her family. It is completely taken care by her husband and son and it is she who controls it. They assume that I can manage it in a better way.

Participant 5:

“Kudumbashree has taught me about all the duties and rights of women. I came to know things in a better way with better clarity. I was a normal woman, just knowing how to cook and take care of household. I was even scared to talk to people. In home, even when my husband asked me few suggestions regarding things, I hardly make some suggestions. I always think that, it is the duty of the husband to decide. Now I came to know that decisions taken together have better results and started to mingle with people”

It was noticed through the field work that she was exited in sharing a whole lot. Most of the interactions were among all her family members, where her family was also grateful for her involvement to Kudumbashree. She has taken loans from Kudumbashree for her daughter’s education. She was sharing things about how she shares and controls everything in the house

both financially and emotionally which was also understood during the interaction with her family members.

There was another case of a woman, who was emotionally weak and fallen where her ayalkootam member bought her back to normality. Her husband committed suicide 19 years ago and the family blamed her for the instance. She was even depressed by hearing all these where she continued to live for her 12-month-old girl child. Later through small loans provided by the Kudumbashree, she provided her daughter a proper education. She gives her daughter to a good family with proper marriage rituals. But now her daughter hardly calls her, where she become emotionally down and was tearing.

Participant 6:

‘I have many problems in my life but I don’t want anyone to show me sympathy. I will live unless god calls me. I always have my neighbors and a few friends to support me and that is enough, I will go to their house when I feel lonely and depressed. I am proud to say that with nothing I have reached so far. (*“onnumillaymayil ninnum njan ithra ethi, bakki varunidethu”*). I thank god for all these’.

These include one of the emotional interviews which were done during the fieldwork. During the first visit, the participant wasn’t comfortable with me; later, repeated visits made her feel comfortable where the entire in-depth interview were taken. Women being always considered to be emotionally weak; this instance should be considered as a challenge to women. All her life experiences were challenging in one or the other way. Her involvement to ayalkootam meetings and opinion about her from the neighbors was so good where it was noticed that, drastic changes has taken place because of her involvement to Kudumbashree and the respondent shows the world how a women should be irrespective of being emotionally weaken where people tend to take advantage of it.

It was evident from the above mentioned case about how the organizations helps in lifting women who is emotionally down, which led to her empowerment and development. It would therefore true to justify that Kudumbashree always follows a holistic approach. Besides this there were even cases where a group of respondents claim that, in the beginning when they started involving to agriculture there were people who teased them. We started with tapioca

plantation. We got so several remarks like “*kappa thirichu kuthanda*” .i.e. don’t do it if you don’t know how? They offended us by saying that we are all kids and men are supposed to involve into all such activities. Women are always supposed to sit inside house and take care of household things. We replied them by showing productive yield in the next coming year, where they started encouraging and supporting us. As mentioned in the earlier quotes, some of the women are of the perspective of abiding the patriarchal norms where even then the observation made it realize that, they don’t want them to be treated inferior by their partners and in laws.

All these made us realize that, drastic changes have happened in the life cycle of women after her involvement to Kudumbashree. Women even started entering to the service sectors which were only initially allowed for men.

“After scripting success in fields ranging from cookery to IT, Kudumbashree women have now forayed into the construction sector, too. Houses being built by Kudumbashree workers are nearing completion at Manjapra in the Angamaly block; Nayarambalam in Vypeen; Amballur in Mulanthuruthy; Kumbalangi in Palluruthy and Varappetty in Kothamangalam. In every project, all the employees, right from the engineers to the masons, are women” (Amman, 2018).

This indicates the presence of women in all sectors across Kerala. It is also advisable to mention that, Kudumbashree is also supporting such initiation by providing women with the skill assessment classes and training programs. This also enables in analyzing Kudumbashree’s role in women empowerment.

These include few of the response of the participants throughout the fieldwork. Beside these, the researcher also had the informal conversations with the children of the participants, where it was noticed that they tend to approach their mother for everything especially matters concerning to education which showcases the dynamics in decision making. There were few cases, where women felt shy in sharing few of her experiences because of the reasons of being forward. They needed to be calm and quiet but later it was noticed that there are two reasons for their quietness; one being silent and abiding patriarchal norms and other being uncomfortable towards the researcher, which later was made normal. Involvement to the meetings also made it clear that, women share all their perspectives together without any fear. It was a forum to sing song, have entertainment program, laugh aloud etc. They open their mind without any sort of hesitation. In Shalabham unit they usually involved into entertainment program after their usual

discussions about the current issues. Attendance was taken, where they also enquire about the absentees of the previous week. If any matters concerning health or emergency are being needed, financial aid was provided from the thrift money being collected. All the issues related to gender and problems in the families are also discussed where appropriate remedial measures are provided. In a similar manner ayalkootam meetings happen in Sawparnika unit too. Here, they are too much into singing than to entertainment programs. They were even proud in sharing that they secured 2nd place in the panchayath level singing competition. Even they were concerned about the financial and health issues of all their members. As mentioned, since they possess long years of experience, involvement to all the activities was observed as matured and organized. It doesn't mean that the other unit was not organized; it is just that the one being more matured and other being excited on everything. Ethnographic study being conducted in the two nearby units, it benefited in having interactions, not only with the participants, but also with their family members.

5.4 Involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities.

Women in both the units were, involved into some or other things for their development. As mentioned in previous chapter, there were few authors who claim that economic empowerment of women always enables in all forms of empowerment. It even leads to full empowerment when a woman can live independently without her husband's support. This chapter also tries to explain how women tried to involve into entrepreneurial activities like making snacks, sweets, paste etc. Women's involvement to JLG (Joint Liability Program) led her to agricultural activities. All these activities made women to involve into many multitasking activities.

Members of Sawparnika unit were into JLG since last 10 years. They were into tapioca and banana plantation. Currently they are planting banana. It includes 5 persons membership. After they did plantation and got profit, another 5 can take up some other agricultural activities. All plantations were successful and profitable. During initial times there were many to plantation, currently women learnt many activities and hence plantation was not only the mode of financial aid. Still some people do it, because of their interest and convenience. They say that

“Since involvement to many things not only provided us financial aid, but it gives us some kind of relief. Though we undergo many problems

inside house, these few hours of works give us comfort zone. Especially jobs like making of sweets and soap powder, JLG plantation etc. It is our own friends who are into such activities. We use to have leisure time talks, which we won't get if we work under some company”.

Shalabham being a new unit, their involvement to JLG was lacking. They just initiated and hence JLG was new to them. They involved into many other activities like making sweets, soap powder and soap etc. They were many who also involved into Tailoring and Pappad making company. There was special training provided to them by Kudumbashree. The organization always enables women to be a part of some or another thing apart from household things. There were also separate loans provided for these activities. It was observed that, the women were the major economic support to the family and it was very difficult to have a personal interaction with these people because of their busy schedule, which can even be included as a positive impact of women being involved into many activities.

“During initial period, it was difficult for all of us to take care of both the household and job together. But it was upon us the monthly income of the family rests in. Now though our children grew up and started earning, doing all activities makes our day complete”.

All the women, in the unit were the part of some or other activities. These were also relief for some people who were leading an isolated life. The landlords were very humble in giving them the land for agricultural activities as the part of JLG. Hence entrepreneurial activities also served as an positive impact on women. It also enables in being bold which results in making decisions without any hesitation.

5.5 Role of Kudumbashree in decision making process

In both, the units it was noticed that the NHGs were encouraged to meet as many times as possible. Election of women from among themselves as President, Secretary and other volunteers with specific responsibilities facilitate in providing women a particular liability on a meticulous thing. This leads in increasing decision-making capability and significant changes in gender role contributing in comprehensive development and social capital configuration. It was also noticed that a few of the officials, who are controlling the Kudumbashree, are male. This was also visible when I visited the state district Kudumbashree mission offices, this male authority was visible.

Here we can glimpse the gender dynamics of how men started working for women's welfare and empowerment.

As mentioned earlier, Empowerment should begin from the family. Tracing back to women's status before her involvement to Kudumbashree, it was observed that the women tend to have only little voice in her home. But her voice had been increased as she began to involve in the community activities of the Kudumbashree. As the women were able to earn money, attain credit and undertake microenterprises, their financial situation had improved and their voice got validated by their family members. The above financial achievement obviously helped in a great way for the female folk to move towards empowerment. In other words, women's total responsibilities had increased. Women's now have increased responsibilities related to saving, getting loans, repaying credit and financial management. In addition, they are now engaged in handling activities earlier performed only by men such as going to PTA meetings, getting certificates, contacting the village administrative officer and other government officials, visiting schools, going to the ration shop and markets and so on. Participation in cultural activities and Gram Saba meetings and marriage and funeral functions of SHGs and NHGs also show their increased social responsibility.

It is also noteworthy to mention the fact that, the factors like educational qualification of the members doesn't not matter much in the level of empowerment, for at least the matters concerning decision making inside and outside home. Their duration of membership and positional status in kudumbashree influences their level of empowerment. Since the positions of the leaders are rotational, the authority always makes sure that all the members are getting equals opportunity without any biases. It is more consistent to say that, more the involvement to Kudumbashree, more the exposure they got to reality. Being firmly rooted in familial environment, the goal target of women empowerment should initiate from the ground layer of the society which includes the family. At least, we can say that, changes have taken place in the means of kudumbashree women when compared to the rest where they lack awareness and knowledge about schemes and policies.

Discussions during meetings always happen for a common cause making sure that all the members are satisfied in some or the other way. Since the rural area lacks skill labor, the meetings are also done to make sure that all women tend to gain skills and attitude.

5.6 Contribution of women in gender equality and public sphere

In current society we can see women equally sharing the economic burden of the family where they lack the power to take decisions. In an ideal home, the final say in all matters is related to the husband, which clearly indicates the discrimination between sexes in the decision-making process. Women have been trying to come up in many ways, where they are being discriminated by strong patriarchal norms. The status of women has gained better value when compared to the ancient times. A historical study of women reveals that, there are distinct changes of rise and fall in her status. Women in Vedic times enjoyed a very high status, where in Rig Veda women and men were co-partners. In those times women were allowed to enjoy the property rights and had access to the property of their father and husband. It was expected for women to be respecting her husband and obey him in familial matters. The Hindu law giver Manu had made women entirely dependent on men and subjugated her to the authority of a father, husband and son across periods. In the laws of Manu the standardized rules for women's behavior are as follows:

“A woman must regard and worship her husband as God, even though he may be deprived of virtue. A woman should be kept in dependence by her husband because by nature, they are emotional and unfaithful. Those women who are able to suffer these bonds of control are regarded as the ideal woman. The salvation and happiness of women depends on their virtue and purity as daughters, wives and widows.”

In Mahabharata, it was written as women should always be looked and protected by means that she is weak. This being the situation of women in ancient times, several social reformers emerged and led to changes in the status of women by providing them better education and awareness. The Hindu revivalist organizations such as Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj gave a great forward motion to the awakening of womanhood. The two major movements that have happened to equal the status of women include the Social Reform movement of the nineteenth century and the Nationalist Movement of the Twentieth century. All these brought self-consciousness and awareness about the injustice being done to women. Those include the situation of women, where they started fighting for all their rights. This leads to Gender Equality and Citizenship rights to women. Educating women was observed as a common solution for fighting against all such injustice.

Gender equality implies the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men which has to be equally accepted by all the spheres of society. Generally, everyone misunderstands gender equality as women's issues, it has nothing to do with women alone, but it concerns in engaging men as well as women. Looking to the current scenario it was observed that, women always fail to equal opportunity. Kudumbashree helps in doing so. It was observed that in both the units women participated in a wide range of public activities, many common to all locations and some specific to each location. Common to all were attendance at meetings and trainings, involvement in social campaigns and participation in festivals and social events. Women are now regularly attending Gram Sabha meetings and learning how to get their entitlements through government schemes. The farm women have also been active in the agricultural sectors, making and selling of sweets, milk society, standing for society elections and participating in auctions. All these activities gain public attention and the panchayath started calling women for all their activities. It was also observed that panchayth at times depend on these women for collection of some data with little remuneration paid to them. All these makes us understand the role that Kudumbashree has played for women's upliftment.

Besides this, it also enable in providing technical and personal skills by analyzing the type of skill they require. No respondent has negatively replied on the skill they achieved even though there are individual and panchayat and area wise differences. All the respondents reported about the personal skills they had acquired, the ability to speak out, to articulate, to voice their problems and difficulties, to negotiate and bargain, to meet officials and put issues to them and so on. There is immense growth in both self-confidence and the skills on which that confidence was based. There is substantial increase in the financial management skills of Kudumbashree women.

The formation of micro enterprises and their management helped them to acquire a variety of technical skills related to the kind of enterprise taken up by the women's groups. These included seed production, organic farming, mushroom cultivation, food processing, cultivation of herbal plants, preparation of herbal medicines, bookbinding, flower cultivation, pisciculture, making ornamental flowers, growing ornamental fish and so on. In certain areas these skills acquired by women helped men of the farming community to take up production

seriously. It is observed that majority of the micro enterprises are running out of agricultural raw materials.

During the study, it was noticed that in many occasions, it was women who came up with better suggestions and ideas. This was mainly observable during the workshop conducted in the panchayath for gender. The workshop includes the participation of both the genders, where many queries and clarifications during the workshop were cleared by women. In the similar manner the discussions involved in the meeting of community councilors of Thrissur district was also noteworthy. The concept of gender and discussions regarding the current situation of women was well-informed connecting to the reality. During the gathering of sharing individuals experience inside home, it was evident that women tend to take majority of the decisions in home. The classes and discussions were conducted based on the situations of women. All these made us clear about the how Kudumbashree has made changes in their life of rural women. Gender dynamics is also evident. Previously it was observed for the men to involve in agricultural activities, use bank account, talk in the forum, take decisions and control everything but later after their involvement to Kudumbashree, it made changes in all such stereotypes. Women started gaining attention.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

India is male dominated society and guarantees equality in all sectors. It is the mentality and mind set of the society which has to be changed. As mentioned earlier by Gerda, patriarchy can happen only with the cooperation of women, when she expects it in a normal way than treating herself inferior to someone, all such problems can be reduced (Lerner G. , 1986). Women are always ready to fight for their right and equality in opportunity. Many initiatives have taken place by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Study conducted in Kudumbashree made it realize that there is betterment in the situation of women and they possess the capability of taking decisions by her own, especially in household matters. Hence it can be concluded by saying that empowerment always remains a challenge and it re-engages with patriarchy, not in a conflicting perspective but in matters of equality. It is the mind set of people which has to be changed and altered. Empowerment can take place socially, economically, politically and culturally. All the form of empowerment together makes a person fully empowered.

CHAPTER 6

Findings and Conclusion

Self Help Groups grant a unique opportunity for giving out credit to the poor with assured requirements and repayments at the doorstep. It opens the door for the entire mankind, especially women and is accepted by everyone across the globe. Kudumbashree is an organization initiated by the State Government of Kerala with the objective of poverty eradication and women empowerment. It follows a holistic approach thereby enabling women for her social, economic, political and cultural empowerment. The thrift collection of the organization was widely accepted by everyone which benefits the Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) to facilitate the poor to provide them cost effective and easy credit. And hence it is known to be “poor women’s bank”. Needless to say, the achievement of Kudumbashree has substantially benefitted the poor and the marginalized in the backward areas of Thrissur district. The first and foremost visible impact would be the changes that have occurred in the life of every single individual after her involvement in Kudumbashree. It provides them with the awareness about their right and duties. The meetings at the grassroots level gave topmost priority for women empowerment which includes responsibilities, leadership skills, knowledge etc among rural women which empowers her.

The researcher has adopted ethnographic study in doing it. Participant Observation and the in-depth study were used as the major tool for the study. The secondary sources include the data collected from the books, articles, journals, newspaper etc. Main focus of the study includes the following research questions:

- Empowerment does not entail a singular meaning. Different scholars across disciplines have defined it in different ways. An economic form of empowerment doesn’t explain the social and political aspect of empowerment. This study explains how the meaning of empowerment vary according to different contexts, both space and time.
- How empowerment deals with the question of structural inequalities. Does empowerment enable women to renegotiate with identity location like those governed by caste, class and gender?
- How women empowerment contests patriarchy through reconfiguration of the decision-making process? Does it necessarily challenge patriarchy?

- How a woman is empowered after her involvement to Kudumbashree. Does it have an impact on her entire life circle, both in Public and Private Space?

The emergence of Kudumbashree is a great boon to the marginalized poor women in Kerala which results in their upliftment. It is praiseworthy to mention that, all such opportunities enables in their development, without compromising their family life. Women entrepreneurs always face a problem of tackling both the household sector and entrepreneurial activities. Here the women are given complete control over the employment, where everything works out according to their convenience. I could recognize considerable development taking place in the areas of Annamanada Panchayath of Thrissur District. It can endorse the real fact that Kudumbashree mission achievements, especially in terms of women's capability to come out in life. It was noticed that all the women have reached a particular level of empowerment where she knows to take decision independently, started believing in the freedom of speech and individuality, knows to differentiate right and wrong etc. Political participation of women has also increased considerably. It would be more appropriate to mention that women's involvement in SHGs has provided drastic changes in her life.

As a result of women's involvement to all such activities, it creates an environment where the women who were homebound earlier and were not able to interact with outsiders are becoming more confident and articulate decision makers. Women from both the units who are taken for the study .i.e., Sawparnika and Shalabham were active in all activities. Many of them opined that their level of interaction and involvement to the public has increased because of such gatherings. Being a leader increases their responsibilities inside and outside house thereby enabling one to take a decision and stand independently. Women started involving in activities which at an initial stage was carried out by only men. A few such activities include contacting the village officers, visiting schools for PTA meetings, going to ration shop, going to funeral etc.

“Women households are the cruellest victims of deprivation and destitution” (K.Venugopalan, 2014, pp. 35-44). Kudmbashree enables in removing all such barriers by providing a holistic empowerment to its women. The study conducted in the units enabled to have a broad idea and understanding of many concepts thereby covering the main objectives of the study. As the part of the study, the researcher also tried to have an interaction with the family members of the respondents.

6.1 Major observations of the study

It was observed through the study that women are always ready to fight for her rights. The stereotype of “so-called expected behaviour of women in society” is not allowing her to come out of the shell. Decision making capability has gained drastic changes where all the household decisions are taken by women. Gender equality tends to gain more value. Though women empowerment has been achieved to a large extent, discussion with the higher official with matters regarding sexuality and women’s role in sexuality, it was noticed that not much changes have occurred. As a result, there is a possibility of an increase in domestic violence. The questions of women’s role in sexuality remained unanswered which can actually result in questioning the term of complete empowerment.

A considerable amount of changes has happened in the life of all women in the area taken for study. Proper awareness has been provided about their rights and duties in the society. Contrary to (K.Venugopalan, 2014), (Shihabudheen, 2013), there was no caste and class-based discrimination observed by the researcher.

The conceptual definition of empowerment varies. The definitions mentioned in the above chapters tend to be similar because of the fact that, all the respondents reside in the same area. But the familial situations and circumstances vary for all the respondents which can be a major reason for the conceptual variation observed in the study.

6.2 Major findings of the study

- Participation In Ayalkootam Meetings And Activities

The participants are actively involved in NHG activities. In the last six years both the units had many activities with maximum participation. It was observed that, most important factor that motivated the participants in joining the program was the availability of loan with less interest which aids in living independently and also the political participation which benefits in bringing their voice in front of the society. The availability of the loan also enables the members to save money for their children's education. This is followed by other forms of empowerment which include social empowerment, personality and skill development, political development etc.

It was also observed that there was active participation of members in NHG meetings and 90% of women from the meetings are regular. Other 10% misses the meeting due to emergencies or health issues. The priority in the discussion during the Ayalkootam meetings observed was the

distribution of loans at the starting which is followed by social issues in their areas and personal issues of the members. The respondents also involved in cultural activities if time permits.

Ayakkottam (NHGs) tend to involve more in activities which provides awareness about women empowerment. All the participants tend to have a proper idea about their rights and duties. They started living independently with the power to take a decision by themselves. Women started involving themselves into many activities which enable in removing the stereotype prevailing in the society. They do face familial and societal barriers where they started breaking it for their own sake. Leadership opportunities being provided on the basis of equality, all women tend to get an opportunity which enables in taking up responsibilities.

- Socio-Economic Features of the Members in the Units

Kudumbashree has its own classification of APL and BPL. Out of the total of 38 respondents observed in the study 15 belong to Above Poverty Line and 23 of them are from Below Poverty Line. All of them belong to any among the three religious groups which include Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Thus the study ensures representation for all categories of people in the study area.

It has been observed that 15 members of the units were under the age groups of 40-50 and another 15 under the age group of 50-60. There were 4 respondents below 30 and were four who are above 60. It is also observed that all of the members of the unit were married, and half of the members of the units were accounted by the Government under the category of families of below poverty line. Many of the respondents are engaged in micro enterprises and are more matured in the decision-making process in the areas related to the microenterprise and important breadwinner in the family.

The study also reveals that majority of the members of the units had educational qualification of high school and 10th class/SSLC .i.e 25 of the participants. The remaining percentage of 7 members constituted the qualification of 12th /pre-degree. There were only 4 with B.com qualification who are taking care of accounts in the NHG. There were 2 member who is in into nursing and tailoring. The educational status has always benefited in increasing awareness and also contributed to the successful implementation of projects.

The family structure includes both joint and nuclear families. Majority of the respondents belonged to nuclear families and 3 of them residing in joint families. All respondents had access

to electricity which shows that all of them have the basic amenities for living in their house. It was also noticed that all the families have sanitary latrines attached to their houses and it reveals the improved hygienic standards maintained by the participants. The houses were built with all the basic necessities were few of them lack proper facilities and incompleteness of house due to the economic situation of the family.

Monthly income of the respondents varies from daily wages to monthly salary. However, all such contribution is the combined effort of both the husband and the wife. Regarding the ownership of land by the families of the respondents, it was seen that only a few per cent do not own land.

- Impact of Awareness Classes

The awareness class that has been provided helps them in updating themselves with current issues and reality. They started differentiating right and wrong. Classes on gender help in their empowerment resulting in major changes in their decision-making capability. It helps them in knowing about the schemes and policies which would provide them aid and beneficiaries. One of the participants was able to avail her BPL (Below Poverty Line) card because of the organization. It also helps them in realizing the importance and usage of the internet and all related social media. At the initial stage, all the participants were against the usage of all the social media and scolded their children for its usage. In a similar manner, they also encouraged in providing their daughters higher education than making them get married. All the participants were fortunate about their involvement in the organization.

6.3 Kudumbashree – A journey so far

The journey through Mambra locality of Annamanada panchayath covering the cultural constraints and empowerment benefited me in covering all the variations of empowerment. The participants were very active and co-operative throughout the fieldwork.

The major observation found by the researcher so far through the journey is that Kudumbashree has made drastic changes in the life of all the women. It was also understandable by comparing the changes that have happened to her before and after her involvement to the organization. The study was conducted in the Annamanda Panchayath of Thrissur District.

Existing literature on the study conducted in Kudumbasree Organization in Thrissur district mentions that:

“Thrissur District is known as the cultural capital of Kerala. People are passionate about fine arts and engaged in primary sector activities. Thrissur District Kudumbashree Mission has set an example by setting up the most popular enterprises like Nature Fresh Milk, Nivedyam and Catering” (Santosh, 2014).

The same was observed through the study where, the entire participants were involved in some or the other activities which keep them engaged in their leisure time. It has provided them with the opportunity to empower economically. In a similar manner, they have also empowered socially, politically and culturally.

The members of both the units are exposed to many things as the results of awareness classes which have been provided. They are renowned in their own home today because of the economic independence they have acquired. Beside this, they got the knowledge to differentiate right and wrong which led to increase in decision making capability. They felt recognized across the society by the use of various skills which mainly includes leadership traits, communication skills, entrepreneurial traits, maintenance and usage of bank accounts, public relations etc.

These provide the opportunities for them to take up responsibilities and leadership role which engages them with social reality.

“Political Empowerment of Women - In 2010 alone 11,773 women candidates’ contested Panchayath election and 5485 of them had won the elections” (Santosh, 2014).

These make it clear about how the political involvement of women has increased. Women started competing in political elections and also started participating in Grama Sabha Meetings. All such initiations have increased the capacity and morale of women which enables them to face any challenges in life confidently.

6.4 Difficulties and problems of the members

The serious problem which was observed during the study was, in one among the unit there were lack people who were interested in taking up the role of president and secretary. They denied because of the following reasons which includes their educational status and not being comfortable in dealing with the accounts and were scared of taking responsibilities. Kudumbashree, as mentioned, has kept a special training program against such problems. The

other problem includes the political participation of women, out of 38 respondent's interview only below 40% of them are interested in politics. The problems may be familial constraints which the respondents fail to disclose. Though the organization provides ample opportunities, political interest was lacking among a few. Those who are into politics have reached the good status. Shalabam being a new unit, there were many activities which were new to them. Many of the members earlier belong to another unit, which stopped functioning due to the problems and improper settling of loan amounts. Hence few members of the unit still are worried about the NHG, though it is running successfully.

6.5 Conclusion

Kudumbashree has proved that women are the agents of change towards development. They have all the rights to get equal treatment and opportunity. Kudumbrashree has changed the life of many women and hence the organization is viewed differently by different people. It is a relief for many people, for some, it is a place where they express all their feelings, for some, it's a financial aid, for some its happiness. It is viewed differently by many people. It is a helping hand for many people. It helps in making women empowered politically, socially, economically and culturally. All these forms of empowerment together make a woman fully empowered and Kudumbashree helps in doing that.

The study conducted by several authors across the state mentioned the similar perspectives pointed out by the researcher. But most of the studies include a quantitative study and interview schedule where the responses from the respondents are taken into consideration. Here the researcher had interactions not only with the participants but also with the family members especially their husband and the children, which makes the study unique. It would be good if the organizations function in a similar manner than getting influenced by any other social evils. It would benefit from maintaining professionalism. State Mission of Kudumbashree has proved that it is working extremely well in the previous years.

Hence the study based on Kerala poverty eradication model Kudumbashree, a model with more positive than negative impact is concluded as a programme which truly empowers women in Kerala. The findings cannot be generalized since it is a micro study. All the unit members were observed to be empowered with the skills which aid them to continue

the rest of their life. The inferences from the study points out that Kudumbashree's attempt in empowering women of Kerala has been achieved to a larger extent.

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