

**POVERTY ALLEVIATION TO PARTICIPATORY
CITIZENSHIP: ROLE OF KUDUMBASHREE IN
POLITICALLY EMPOWERING WOMEN IN KOTTAYAM
DISTRICT OF KERALA**

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BY

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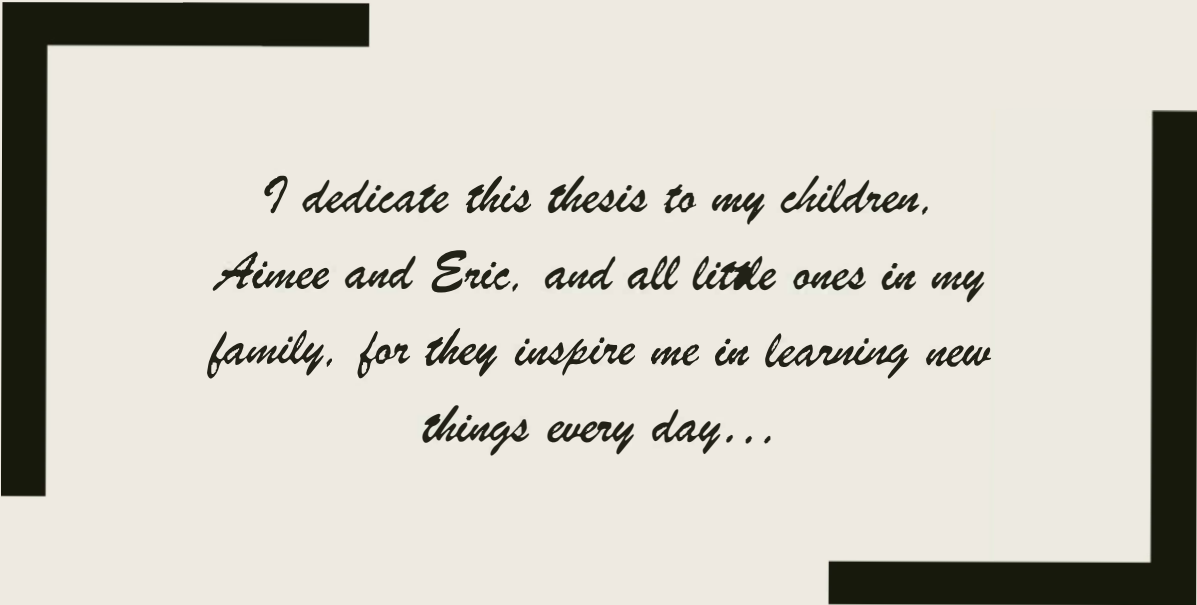
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JUNE 2020.



*I dedicate this thesis to my children,
Aimee and Eric, and all little ones in my
family, for they inspire me in learning new
things every day...*



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in Politically Empowering Women in Kottayam District of Kerala" submitted by Ms. Jinu Francis bearing Reg. No 14 SIPH06 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy is a bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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A. Published in the following Journal:

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Further, the student has completed following courses in the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy;

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DECLARATION

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GLOSSARY

Abbreviations

PRA	Panchayati Raj Act
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
UP	Uttar Pradesh
SHG	Self-Help Groups
CBO	Community Based Organisations
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
CDS	Community Development Society
ADS	Area Development Society
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005
NHG	Neighborhood Groups
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
CEDAW	Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
WIA	Women's Indian Association
ECI	Election Commission of India
MP	Member of Parliament
UPA	Urban Poverty Alleviation
LSGI	Local Self Government Institution
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
SC/ST/OBC	Scheduled Castes/Tribes/Other Backward Castes
APL	Above Poverty Line

BPL	Below Poverty Line
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
LDF	Left Democratic Front
UDF	United Democratic Front
BJP	Bharatheeya Janatha Party
CPI(M)	The Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI	The Communist Party of India
BDJS	Bharat Dharma Jana Sena
NSS	Nair Service Society
UNICEF	United Nations United Nations Children's Fund
KILA	Kerala Institute of Local Administration

CHAPTER I

Introduction and Methodology

1.1. Introduction

The term ‘women empowerment’ attained new dimensions as United Nations proclaimed the year 2001 as the International Year of Women Empowerment and the phenomenon of women empowerment drawn unprecedented attention of scholars globally. While empowerment brings in development, development drive down gender inequality (Duflo, 2012), wherein empowerment is not merely poverty reduction and economic growth but multidimensional (Hanmer and Klugman, 2016). Therefore, academic researches analyze women empowerment agencies comparing individuals across groups, undergird the studies on a definition of agency that derived from Amartya Sen (1985a). This definition describes agency as a means to women empowerment which is exercised in many spheres of life. While considering the multidimensional activities integrating into empowerment, Naila Kabeer’s (2008) definition of ‘empowerment agency’ which describes agency as the one that changes regressive norms and institutions perpetuating subordination of women comes into light.

The concept of women empowerment became deep-seated into policies and programmes of governments post declaration of ‘Women’s Decade’ by united nations in 1975. The gender equality principle that enshrined in the Indian Constitution serves as a foundation for legislation, policies, plans and programmes for women empowerment in India. Among the government policies that address the subordination and deprivation of women in Indian society, women reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) that ensured equal political representation of women at the grassroots level is a breakthrough in the realm of women empowerment.

Women empowerment refers to upgrading their position in the power structure of the society by providing them freedom and access to resources which were denied to them for being women. The term empowerment is closely related to power and status (Mandal, 2013), therefore, the entry and existence of women in the power structure of the society is pivotal in achieving empowerment and equality. Regrettably, the Indian legislative bodies at the centre and state levels exemplify the under-representation of women in the political sector of India (Iyer et al., 2012).

However, women reservation in PRIs is a revolutionary provision for women granted through the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments that provided self-governance status to PRIs; a three-tier system at the village, block and district levels (Nandal,2013). Kerala Panchayat Raj Act in 1994 initially reserved 33% seats in local bodies for women, that later in 2010 increased to 50%. This statutory reservation promoted women into society's political sector ensuring their formal involvement in local body administration through the electoral process at grass-root level. Women reservation together with the reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribe activated the upliftment of women in the lower socio-economic strata of Indian society (Billava and Nayak, 2016).

In the context of the People's Plan campaign and devolution of powers to PRIs, Government of Kerala established Kudumbashree in 1998, which is another breakthrough in the sphere of women empowerment (Venugopalan, 2014). It is an agency for carrying out multifarious activities at the local self-government level targeting at poverty eradication and multidimensional advancement of women in all sectors of the society (Varghese and Mavooth, 2014). Kudumbashree promotes democratic leadership and it provides a support structure for the members through its community network. Kudumbashree offered training programmes aiming at capacity-building by imparting knowledge and skill, along with economic provisions give thrust to the empowerment of rural women in Kerala (Kumar, 2012). Working under the ministry of Local Self Government Departments (LSGD), Kudumbashree conducts its programmes in convergence with PRIs. Therefore, women in Kudumbashree gain acquaintances with PRIs and their function through their work in Kudumbashree. As a matter of fact, when these women enter into politics it is inevitable to consider the role of Kudumbashree in empowering women politically. Besides, the persisting disparity between the situational reality on the status of women and their constitutional position calls for an investigation on the actual allocation of power by elected women members in PRIs towards achieving equal status addressing the prevailing patriarchy system in politics and the society as a whole. Furthermore, it is important to document the process of transformation of women from an apolitical entity to a politician, in providing a reference for political aspirants among women in rural India. Finally, scientific studies and reports on women empowerment agencies contributes to policy revisions for the accomplishment of equal participation of women in social development ensuring gender equality

1.2. Poverty and Women

While India houses lakhs of 'calorie' conscious purposefully starving super-rich population, it also houses millions of people who desperately search for a day's food. As per the United Nations record, India had 21.9% of its population living below the poverty line during the year 2011-12. Generally, India follows the Planning commission's calculation derived from Tendulkar methodology, which defines poverty in terms of consumption or spending of an individual for a basket of essential food over a period of time. However, it is hard to believe Planning commission's claim that, Rs.26 in rural areas or Rs.32 in urban areas, is sufficient to sustain a day's nutritional requirements. And those who can afford these mere sums are considered as living above the poverty line without considering other expenses like medical, conveyance or education. The idea of defining poverty based only on the affordability of food is inappropriate since a range of non-material things have been found necessary to ensure a basic minimum standard of living. Against this backdrop, Amartya Sen came up with a more inclusive definition of poverty, which gave utmost importance to a "person's capability of achieving the kind of life he/she has 'reasons' to value" (1999:18). According to him, "poverty is not just lack of money; it is not having the capability to realize one's full potential as a human being" (Sen,1999:20). A person's capabilities could be diminished by various reasons like his/her lack of education, poor health, lack of financial resources or control over them. Therefore, Sen includes both material and non-material components into the definition of poverty and also acknowledges the fact that everyone differs in their capabilities to utilize available resources and to convert them into valuable 'functionings,' i.e., 'beings and doings' in his terms. Sen, with his co-author Jean Dreze (1995) explains the relationship between income poverty and capability poverty in such a way that both go hand in hand. A person can be free from income poverty by improving his/her education, health and employability and the likes. All these factors together determine one's quality of life in general. The economic reform that has been happening over the last two decades did nothing to redistribute the benefits of added economic opportunities by improving ordinary citizens' basic education, employability skills and general wellbeing. So, the division between rich and poor became very deep and difficult to cross over. We must say, the benefits of economic development of the last two decades, have failed to reach out to a larger section of our society and among them, women remained as the worst affected ones.

In India, poverty is becoming more or less a women's problem. In villages, less educated women are often forced to work for longer hours with fewer wages compared to men. Besides, they are supposed to take care of their children and other ailing elders in the family (Mishra and Pandey, 2012). Alcoholism is prevalent in Indian society today. While men spend most of their hard-earned money on alcohol, women are forced to find a way to fend for themselves. Survival becomes tough for a widow or a divorcee since they have to fight the stigma attached to their position as well. Many societies in India still believe sighting of a divorcee or a widow is inauspicious, which brings them bad luck. The prospect of landing on a job or maintaining a livelihood is challenging for a single woman with young children. Though the situation of educated urban women is slightly better in cities, we cannot say the same for uneducated, poor and marginalized rural women. Rural women have to fight against all the odds for their survival with minimal resources. With no education and land assets at their disposal, their survival itself is a wonder. During this struggle for existence, most women have to deal with personal tragedies like suicides and fatal illnesses of their own or their family members. Wife beating associated with alcoholism is also common among the rural population in India. Women in rural areas depend on the agricultural sector for employment mostly. The climate changes, unseasonal rains, introduction of more sophisticated machinery have reduced their prospect of getting a job in this sector. Lack of organization among labourers, lack of coordination among different trade unions, the existence of leaders targeting their 'own' monetary benefits along with governmental apathy towards this sector often leaves them vulnerable and helpless. For political parties, rural women are mere 'vote banks', so they have been treating them accordingly. Rapid urbanization causes a steep increase in migration from rural areas to city limits. Those who migrate from rural areas with their limited education and skillsets often end up as domestic helpers or street vendors.

In a working paper prepared by Nilufer Cagatay titled "Poverty and Gender" for UNDP in 1998, the author identifies reasons such as biased resource allocation within the households, women's inability to convert their capabilities into income due to various cultural and social circumstances, vast disparities in income distribution, unfair exclusion from the labour market and their relative lack of 'time' for their comparative poverty. If this is the case, Indian women have many hindrances on their way to transforming their capabilities into well-being, and therefore they are said to be 'poorer' than men' in many ways. As development itself can be considered as 'expansion of

choices', without the availability of 'choices' aimed to expand their socio-economic and political status women may well remain in side-lines forever.

1.3. Women in Kerala

Since the present study concentrates in Kerala, the researcher would like to add a few points regarding the issues faced by women in Kerala. Like their counterparts in the rest of India, women in Kerala also face all those problems mentioned above, especially, the issues related to alcoholism that deserves a special mention here. Kerala's per capita consumption of alcohol is 8.3 litres per annum, with an estimated 10% of the population showing problematic drinking (Jaisoorya et al., 2018). Though there has been a ban on production and selling of 'arrack' since 1996, due to faulty implementation and watering down of the policy, the situation remains more or less the same, adding woes to the ordinary lower-middle-class women across the state. Low mental health awareness and high suicidal rate also affect Kerala's population severely. Male migration to abroad and to other cities has contributed to the increase in woman- headed households as well as the social problems associated with it like divorces, behavioural problems among children, substance abuse and the like. Sen and Dreze (1995) point out Kerala's failure to use its human resources at home effectively by creating more economic opportunities as one of the reasons of its poor growth performance despite high educational and social achievements.

However, with a nominal GDP, Kerala successfully achieved a higher position in the Human Development Index (HDI), in comparison with other economically well-off states in India. Kannan (1999:17), points out Kerala's "early commercialization, transformation of the labour force into mainly non-agricultural, early foundations in improving access to education and health care to the weaker sections and the relatively better position of women as its favourable initial conditions." However, he further notes that these favourable initial conditions were overshadowed by a few adverse initial conditions like high population density, its dependence on its neighbouring states for food grains, high incidence of income poverty and a high rate of unemployment and the like. Anyhow, Kerala remarkably overcame most of its constraints by expanding social opportunities for marginalised. The difference between Kerala and the rest of India in achieving faster-paced human development has been discussed in detail by V.K Ramachandran (1997) and Dreze and Gazdar, 1997) in Sen and Dreze edited "Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspective" (1997). They attribute Kerala's success to the role of "public action" in attaining a range of social

prospects related to primary education, redistribution of land, the role of women in society and the extensive health care provisions and other public services and Uttar Pradesh's (U.P) failure to the public neglect of the same social opportunities. Out of all the reasons the authors say, 'the role of literacy' especially female literacy in promoting basic capabilities could be one of the prime reasons for Kerala's social achievements later on. Secondly, the women in Kerala, exercise their agency derived from their much better social opportunities, more efficiently than their U.P counterparts who have been suffering from sharp gender oppression for centuries. Thirdly, while Kerala's well-functioning public services system has played an important role in alleviating poverty, U. P's public services system faltered big time in ensuring better living conditions for their poverty-stricken masses. Fourthly, while Kerala's vigilant public has always been enthusiastically involved in the discussions about public policies via social actions, U. P's public mostly stayed away from the affairs of government let alone influencing its priorities. Finally, in Kerala, people are highly politically conscious and are ardent supporters of political activism which promoted marginalized groups' political involvement, whereas in U.P traditional inequalities and extreme social division barred people from active participation.

Gender discrimination is a worldwide phenomenon, the extent of which varies across countries and regions. The World Bank Policy Research Institute defines gender equality in one of its reports titled *Engendering Development* (2001:2) in terms of “equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process”. If this is the case, we can see that we have plenty of laws and policies in place to ensure equality under the law, but we clearly lack the will to enforce them effectively. Pay disparities and the absence of women's voice in the decision-making bodies further promote inequality. In the case of women in India, the achievement of 'equality' in all spheres of life is still a distant dream since they are under the hypnotic spell of men. Being branded as ‘anti-women’, feminists often face the wrath of their fellow women for propagating the idea of equality. Somehow, among the general public, there is a belief that 'feminism' is too westernized to follow and against Indian culture. Interestingly, they seem to have made peace with the idea of their submissive role in society. In such a scenario Sen's idea of 'capability expansion' should come to the rescue of those who seek for equality. As per this approach, all should be given ample opportunities to expand their capabilities since it has the capacity to enhance one's quality of life

either directly or indirectly. It is important to note that “addressing income poverty alone will not resolve the matter unless it is complemented with adequate 'social opportunities. For example, an illiterate or an ill- healthy person cannot make use of advantages offered by a well-functioning market and vice versa” (Sen and Dreze, 1995: 6). So, any programmes or policies aimed to alleviate poverty among women by empowering them should ensure an environment conducive for their development, free from all sorts of inequality, injustice and discrimination that encourages women to make use of all available social opportunities.

More than half a century ago while Jawaharlal Nehru addressed our nation on 14th August 1947, at the Constituent Assembly, he insisted on the importance of ending poverty, ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity (Sen and Dreze quote from Gopal, 1983). But Nehru’s dream of prosperous India remains unfulfilled even after 72 years for which Sen and Dreze (1995:8) blame failures of successive governments to ensure better public educational facilities, social security arrangements, health care provision, local democracy, environmental protection and the likes. However, as a developing nation, India has the following achievements to show off to the rest of the world in the census report of 2011

- The growth rate of female (18.3%) is slightly higher than that of male's (17.1%) (which is a great achievement considering our society's infamous preference towards male children).
- 2001-2011 added lesser population compared to the previous decade.
- At the national level, the overall sex-ratio has reached at 940 against 2001's 933.
- The literacy rate is 74.04% in 2011 against last decade's 64.83%.

These highlights show that we have made noteworthy advancement in the areas of population control, literacy level and sex ratio during the last decade. Like any other developing nation, gender discrimination is very severe in our country too. Inequalities between boys and girls start from their birth itself in accessing nutritional supplements, health care and schooling. Such denials gradually incapacitate them. Gender sensitization of policies programmes and schemes, the inclusion of women empowerment in five-year plans and the likes have strengthened our womenfolk to a certain extent. Still, the absolute equality between the sexes keeps evading us.

1.4. Educate and Empower

The world has 102 men for 100 women in 2010 which means nearly half of the world's population constitute women, and they contribute significantly towards a nation's social, economic and political growth (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010). Moreover, their contributions in nurturing its future generation are exemplary. Still, they are not getting what they truly deserve. Wherever she goes, she is being treated as a subsidiary to men. The discussion about equality between the sexes has been around for quite some time. All the debates and the discussions about the topic created a general awareness among women which in turn inspired many national and international organizations to take up campaigns on gender equality. Poverty and illiteracy had been identified as two significant hindrances for women's development (Cagatay, 1998). Most of the government programmes and policies, especially on women's education are merely paying "lip services" to women's concerns which are insensitively handled by men decision-makers (Medel – Anonuevo and Bochynek, 1995). Most of the beneficiaries of the developmental programmes are found to be illiterate. Poverty compels women to take up some income-generating activities rather than focusing on their literacy skills. They consider the ability to read and write is secondary. So, it is essential to convince women that, having basic knowledge about their fundamental rights and duties, in addition to the literacy skills, enable them to have a much better life. Another significant challenge here is convincing their husbands to let the women enrol in education programmes. While designing an educational programme for rural adult women, it is crucial to have it designed considering their special requirements as well as their time constraints. "Literacy that empowers seeks to combine both consciousness-raising and participation so that women not only understand the cause of their oppression but also take steps to ameliorate their condition" (Dighe, 1995:43). For most of the problems faced by women, the magical solution suggested by various social scientists is "empower" them holistically and "enlighten" them with knowledge. According to Sen and Dreze (1995:15), "higher literacy and educational achievements enable the marginalised sections of society to resist oppression, to organize politically and to get a fairer deal. Besides, it has the potential to reduce gender-based inequalities within the family significantly".

Lazo (1995), identifies 'source of powerlessness' of women as their illiteracy, the dearth of marketable skills and knowledge, shortage of monetary resources, low confidence and self-

awareness and their insufficient social connection, lack of market knowledge and the like. Powerlessness can be considered as a combination of the interaction of environmental and personal factors. Women's inherent submissive attitude aggravates this situation further. They continue to toil under the hypnotic influence of men without putting any efforts to change their circumstances. Therefore, the first step towards the empowerment must start with an opportunity to reflect upon their life situations which in turn would help them to identify the reasons for their powerlessness. Later as a next step, we can provide them with an enabling environment in which they can design and carry out their own course of actions which would eventually take them out of their state of powerlessness.

1.5. Definitions of Empowerment

The word 'empowerment' features in most of the developmental programmes nowadays as a target to be achieved. It has a different meaning for different people in different contexts. Dighe, (1995:41) quotes Shetty (1992) as saying, “empowerment is a dynamic and an on-going process which can only be located on a continuum”. It encompasses an entire spectrum of activities aimed at the holistic development of the targeted population. Women empowerment in its real sense happens only when their economic, social and political status improves. A truly empowered woman would be free from all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

Medel – Anonuevo and Bochynek (1995: 8), defines empowerment as "a process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society" quoting Stromquist (1995). Lazo (1995: 25) views it as "a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to control over such means and resources." And Aksornkool (1995:53) based on the report of 1991 Seminar on the Integration of Women in Development views empowerment as a "process in which women gain control over their own lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society". An empowered woman sets her own course of action and fully involves in the process of decision making. Stromquist (1995), defines empowerment in terms of cognitive, psychological, economic and political components. Hinting women's disempowerment begins with their inherent submissive attitude she emphasises the need for a deeper understanding of their subordinate conditions at the cognitive level which involves gaining knowledge that enables them to question existing gender relations and embracing the changes wholeheartedly. The psychological component instils confidence in them to begin

actions targeted to change their circumstances. The economic component stresses the importance of engaging in economically productive activities as financial autonomy is essential for empowerment. The political component encourages women to organize and mobilise for change.

Batliwala (1994:130) describes empowerment as “the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power” and lists out various processes involved in the empowerment as follows; first is, recognizing the systemic forces that oppress individuals/groups. Second is acting to modify prevailing hierarchies. A wide range of activities can be used for this purpose from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. Theoretically, the entire process seems to be linear, hurdle free and easy to attain, but practically it is far from so. As this process essentially involves 'questioning' of the existing power relations within the social institutions, causing a sense of dissatisfaction among the people around which in turn may compel the person to rethink his/her quest to be empowered. Sometimes, the women leaders are forced to act and behave in such a way that their intention is not to threaten the authority of men in any way. In some cases, women who seem to be empowered in public platforms often fail to translate the same to power relations within the family. Therefore, it is a slow-moving gradual process which may take a while to accomplish the final target (Vene Klasan and Valeri, 2002).

Empowerment can be both individual and collective. Empowerment of a group of individuals leads to collective awareness generation, which often propels collective action aimed at social change. In fact, making changes in the collective level seems to be easier than instilling changes in someone's personal space as they resist less to changes in a group environment. Moreover, they draw inspiration from each other, and they support each other even in personal crises in a group environment. According to Lazo (1995: 34), empowerment is “enablement by changing the person, changing structures, replacing or recreating conventional institutions and/or rearranging the environment. Empowerment transpires over time and is a journey from silence to articulation, from invisibility to recognition, and from isolation to organisation.” The concept of attaining collective empowerment forms the basis of organizing women into SHGs. Active involvement in group activities may lead to an awakening of consciousness among women belonged to marginalized communities which in turn motivate them to take necessary steps to come out of their hardships. So, we can see women empowerment as a process in which an individual or a group of individuals

identify their potentials and work towards its accomplishment, despite the negative forces in their present social system by influencing power relations within their families and in the society to bring about positive social changes. The extent of empowerment can be determined by the changes in their economic, social and political status.

Based on the definitions given above, the characteristics of empowerment can be summarized as follows;

- It is a multi-dimensional dynamic process that boosts women's psychological capacity.
- It enables them to accept challenges and motivates them to invest their energy and time to overcome those challenges with poise.
- It is nothing but an effort to 'restructure' their mental capacities to act independently and freely to improve their quality of life.
- The vital process involved in empowerment is enabling women to make use of important resources and services.
- It becomes easy to achieve when a group of people try to achieve it by putting together individual strengths negating individual weaknesses.
- Through the process of empowerment, women learn to respect themselves and their personal capacities and start to believe in their ability to change their circumstances.

1.5.1 Economic Empowerment

Financial autonomy is essential for a woman to free herself from the four walls of her own house. In a traditional orthodox society like ours, financial freedom is a distant dream even for a working woman, because traditionally land ownership rights have been given to male successors. According to Cagatay (1998: 8) 'Gender and Poverty', "women's combined paid and unpaid labour time is greater than men's". It further states that "when women are in paid work, the return to their labour is lower than the return to men's labour. Though women work more, they have lesser command over income and assets. Besides their reproductive responsibilities limit the range of paid economic activities they can undertake". Women's participation in productive activities not only reduces household poverty but enhances economic growth also (Schuler et al., 2010). The increase in household income will have a positive impact on their children's upbringing, which in turn will benefit the society at large (Sudipta and Debnarayan, 2011). Earning women are found to be investing in children's health and education more than their male counterparts. However,

working women tend to adhere with low paying less satisfying ‘feminized’ professions such as nursing, teaching or care of the elderly and disabled, with limited upward mobility (Menon-Sen and Shivakumar, 2001). They usually are forced to stick on to less challenging jobs because of the 'caregiver' role attributed to them in their own family. To improve women's economic status many programmes and policies have been formulated and implemented by both governmental and non-governmental sectors such as;

1. Inclusion of women's perspectives in designing and implementing macroeconomic policies by institutionalising their participation and ensuring universal and equitable access to social services.
2. Enacting gender-sensitive agricultural policies which are tailor-made to the requirements of rural women reduces the bias of policymakers against them and improves their contribution in the production process, especially in the agricultural sector.
3. Formation of women self-help groups (SHGs) based on microcredit created a new history in the empowerment of rural women in India. SHGs are being projected as a tool for both poverty eradication as well as women empowerment (Rajendran, 2012). Previously rural women were never considered as creditworthy by any of the financial institutions. However, the entry of governmental and non-governmental institutions and organisations into microfinancing put an end to their struggle. Their willingness to adopt or sponsor women self-help groups offered them financial security. The formation of SHGs provided a podium for rural women to meet up and raise their voice against various social problems. The thrift and saving activities associated with SHGs brought in much needed financial independence to rural masses. Moreover, vocational and skill training programmes as part of SHG training enabled many of them to take up business ventures.

Governmental Programmes like MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005), NRLM (National Rural Livelihoods Mission) further increased the scope for women SHGs.

1.5.2 Social Empowerment

Indian society upholds its patriarchal values even today while preaching about women equality at length. Theoretically, Indian women are safe from all forms of discrimination and oppression with a number of laws and constitutional safeguards in place, but practically they are far from so. From

birth to death, they face challenges in all walks of life, especially those who are poor and those who belonged to the backward class. In many villages, the toilet facility is not available for girls and women. Maternal deaths due to Anemia and other health problems associated with malnutrition are very high in India (Mishra and Pandey 2012). In fact, more women die of maternal health-related causes in India than in any other countries in the world. Dowry deaths, honour killings, teenage pregnancies, rapes, lack of awareness or accessibility of contraception, preferential treatment towards sons and the likes are prevalent in today's world (World Economic Forum, 2013). Epidemics like HIV/AIDS affect women population more than males due to various biological, cultural and social reasons. Women's inability to have their 'say' on safer sex practices make them more vulnerable. The story becomes even worse when somebody is diagnosed with HIV/AIDS (Motazedian et al., 2015). The cost of treatment and the absence of income more over the social exclusion associated with such sexually transmitted diseases drive many families into suicide. What we need now is a comprehensive, gender-sensitive community-based health policy addressing the disparities between the sexes in accessing health care facilities. In the rural sector, women's ignorance of their reproductive rights often drives them off the track. Having no clues about their reproductive rights they are often forced to agree with their partner's preferences. Ensuring reproductive health for all should be a governmental priority while designing programmes for family planning and maternal health.

1.5.3 Political Empowerment

The percentage of women in the political sphere is negligible even after they have made their presence felt in every other sphere. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the world had, just 22.2 % women Parliamentarians on 1st June 2015. While half of the world population constitute women, this is definitely a negligible quantity. India has 78 women Parliamentarians out of the total 545 (14.58%) members in the 17th Lok Sabha, and in the case of Rajya Sabha it has 25 women representatives out of 239 as on February 8th 2020 (rajyasabha.nic.in). Though the women representation has been exhibiting an increasing trend it hasn't reached near to the recommended threshold level which is definitely a major cause for concern since our great leader Mahatma Gandhi truly believed that women's political presence would bring about revolutionary changes and make the political field more accountable, transparent and corruption-free. However, their involvement as voters is at par with men (Chadha, 2014). But without a requisite number of

women in policy formulation and political decision-making institutions, we cannot expect a radical change in their socio-political status.

There are multiple reasons for women's lower political participation, including worsening sex ratio of women to men. This phenomenon of 'missing women' first explained by Amartya Sen (1990, 1992b) has a direct impact on the electorate sex ratio. Kapoor and Ravi (2013:3) say, based on the theoretical model developed by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) which builds on the framework developed by Osborne and Slivinski (1996) and Coate (1997) known as Citizen Candidate model, *"in constituencies where women are well represented, they do not contest elections while in constituencies where the gender ratio is worse, female candidates contest elections but less likely to win"*. The two predictions together imply that there will be lower women representation in parliament. Other reasons for women's lower representation are increased costs involved in campaigning, rampant corruption in the field of politics and increased use of muscle power in addition to caste, religious and social reasons (Thakur, 2010).

The underrepresentation of women has always been a cause for concern among women groups who demand proportionate representation in decision making bodies. The presence of just above 14% of women belonging to different political parties in Parliament will never be sufficient to create any impact on policymaking decisions of the government. Indian women as voters have their "say" only during the election time. Once they cast their votes, they are out of the picture. Political parties soon forget whatever promises they have made during the campaigns, and the condition of rural marginalized uneducated women remains the same. To encourage women's political participation, a bill has been introduced in Lok Sabha for the first time in 1966 recommending 33.33% reservation for women. Various political parties who otherwise oppose each other in every other issue, unitedly oppose this bill on the grounds like 1) only elite women will get in 2) the proxy women, i.e., wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and the likes would be put up as candidates. However, 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1992 which ensured women's presence in local self-government bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs) did not attract much opposition from the political parties since they believed controlling women representatives in local bodies would be much easier and supporting women reservation in local bodies would have helped them to project themselves as progressive. Their male chauvinistic attitude became evident when the women reservation bill came in front of Lok Sabha and Rajya

Sabha for approval. The male majority parliament right away rejected the proposal in 1996 when it was introduced, and subsequently in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2010. Though the bill passed in Rajya Sabha in 2010, it never presented in Lok Sabha.

Against this backdrop, the role of women self-help groups in politically empowering them should be discussed with the utmost importance. At a time, women found themselves on top of local self-government institutions, inexperienced and ill-informed, they had to work hard to prove their detractors wrong and to convince them that women truly deserved a place in the political arena. Within a few years, women with their gentle power and their ability to multi-task picked up bits and pieces of politics and proved their mettle in the field. Their experience in managing an entire household with limited resources and time also might have helped them to overcome those challenges and to utilise the available resources efficiently. However, we cannot expect a drastic change in a political system that suppressed women's rights over the centuries, with a nominal increase in the percentage of them in the grassroots level, especially when a good percentage among them are said to be proxies of influential male members. In such a scenario, the existence of self-help groups is beneficial in generating political consciousness and in imparting leadership skills among women to a great extent. Their stint with self-help groups has the potential to improve their feminist consciousness as well as to bring out visible changes in the articulation of new ideas. Improved visibility in the social circle of the community as a result of their group involvement is synonymous with their ability to attract attention from policymakers which in turn will reduce their vulnerability and improve their efficiency to use public resources better. In a survey conducted by Thampi and Kawrla (2010-12) as part of their study “Empowering Women Leaders at the Local Level: Translating Descriptive Representation to Substantive Representation through ICTs in Kerala”, it has been noted that 25% of their respondents have been involved in Kudumbashree activities and another 20% of them have acknowledged the role of Kudumbashree and other such organisations in getting them elected. Leadership skills developed as a result of their group involvement coupled with their entry into politics backed by constitutional guarantee can be considered as an effective way to include ‘women’s voice’ and concerns too in the process of rebuilding our nation. In short, women's presence in PRIs has far-reaching consequences, as it has transformed the way Indian politics treated its women over the centuries. The evolution of self-help group movement also may have contributed to this process by boosting up the quality of their political participation by providing them with multiple options to improve their economic, social

and political status, along with self- confidence and assertiveness. This study attempted to analyze the extent of it.

1.6. Self-help Groups and Empowerment

Self-help groups (SHGs) are neighbourhood groups, whose primary aim is to contribute to its participant's economic prosperity, enrich them with new experiences and make them involved in their own 'progress'. Initially, it was visualized as a poverty eradication programme based on thrift and credit activity, but gradually it has become an integral part of the lives of rural women. They came together, sat together and successfully choreographed their own success with little help from their spouses. Recognizing the fact that sustainable development is impossible without participation and empowerment of women, Kerala government launched a programme called Kudumbashree Mission in 1998 aimed to alleviate absolute poverty by organizing female-only neighbourhood groups which encourages them to participate in income-generating activities. This flagship programme links poverty alleviation to active citizenship with a special emphasis on savings and credit activities. Financial independence achieved through their involvement in economic generating activities helped them to make important life-changing decisions with confidence, improved social status enhanced their visibility in the social sphere, which in turn facilitated their political entry.

As Shihabudheen (2013) suggests Kudumbashree differs from most of such initiatives in three aspects; firstly, it approaches the evil of poverty in a holistic way and believes in making the "powerless" their own masters by making them capable of taking autonomous decisions. Secondly, unlike most of the poverty eradication programmes, it recognizes poverty as a problem with different dimensions and treats accordingly by identifying its root cause. It also views "poverty as a state of multiple deprivations" (2013:9) and believes that monetary factors alone cannot solve the problems associated with poverty. Therefore, this programme recommends reinstatement of denied opportunities and basic rights to eradicate absolute poverty.

Though there are many other organizations in Kerala which operate through self-help groups, the researcher associated her study with Kudumbashree because it envisages political empowerment of its participants through their active involvement with LSGIs (Local Self-government Institutions) in addition to poverty alleviation. Moreover, Kudumbashree is the only such organization that provides poor women with a chance to become micro-planners through its

community-based organizations (CBOs) which has a definite role in LSGI's annual planning process. A more comprehensive analysis of Kudumbashree's origin, evolution and functionings have been given in Chapter IV.

1.7. Political Participation and Participatory Citizenship

A thriving democracy always encourages its citizens to take part in the process of political decision-making actively by involving in activities like voting, contesting and campaigning for electoral positions, holding office at all levels of government if elected and the like. Without becoming an official member of a political party, one can get involved in the electoral process by joining civil society organizations or trade unions. 'Voting' is just one of the many activities that define political participation. Apart from the traditional ways, new ways of political engagement based on participatory methodologies of planning, monitoring, research, education and action are being discussed extensively among development scientists around the world (Hilhorst and Guijt, 2006). Efforts were on from the late 1970's itself to bring forth all marginalized groups to mainstream politics by encouraging them to participate in a variety of activities including organizing them into self-help groups. Huntington and Nelson (1976:3) define political participation as "any activities by private citizens designed to influence government decision making". Depends on the situation, the nature of participation may vary from joining a public campaign for a social cause to blogging your political views online. Irrespective of how a person chooses to express his/her political opinion, the ability to influence public decision-making authorities determine one's extent of political participation. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) quote, Parry et al., (1992:16) to define political participation "as a process of engaging in formulation, passage and implementation of public policies". It can include all those efforts of the citizens taken either as individuals or as collectively to influence public representatives and officials to bring about more favourable policy changes. The participatory approach had increased transparency, sustainability and accountability in the affairs of government. This new approach to the 'governance' contributed a new term to the 'social development' literature, i.e. 'good governance', in which the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, is guided by "participation, legitimacy, transparency, accountability, competence and respect for law and human rights", as quoted by Gaventa and Valderrama (1999:4) from Edralin (1997) and Schneider (1999). The role of civil society in governance has been increased with the introduction of democratic decentralization in

many countries like India. It can be defined as "the transfer of resources and power (and often of tasks) to lower- level authorities which are largely or wholly independent of higher levels of government and which are 'democratic' in some way and to some degree" (Manor, 1997: 6-7). In India, a move that brought the government closer to people was the Panchayati Raj Act which encouraged women's participation in the grassroots level politics. Initiatives like “Peoples' Campaign for Decentralized Planning in Kerala” aimed to improve people's direct participation in preparing and effecting both economic and social development projects has won accolades from across the Globe (Issac and Heller, 2003:87).

Indian women's reluctance to join active politics can be attributed to a variety of cultural and social reasons, as mentioned earlier. However, they turn up in huge numbers to exercise their voting right during general elections. The concept of participatory citizenship has been discussed widely for its potential to ensure 'equality' among sexes in democracy. Women's right to pursue a career in politics is declared in articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979). A participatory democracy values meaningful contribution from every citizen of the country in matters related to its governance and all citizens will have equal access to its resources. In our democracy gender disparity in political sphere came to an end at least in local-level politics with the passage of Panchayat Raj act in 1993. And as a result, a million women are being elected to local self-governments ending the monopoly of men (Mohanty, 1995 and Sapovadia, 2007). In the present study, participatory citizenship is nothing but a woman's ability to take part or to influence policy-making decisions by engaging in free and meaningful political activities. It can also be defined as her capability to exercise her political agency in a more matured and responsible way without being judgmental or influenced by anyone to bring in positive social changes in society. For this, an enabling environment is essential wherein women are free from all sorts of discrimination and free to access all relevant information. By launching the Kudumbashree mission in Kerala, the government not only addressed the poverty issue among women but in fact, it created an enabling environment wherein women could be flourished into full-blown political leaders.

1.8. Profile of the Study Area

Kerala is located in the southern peninsula of India. The state is famous among the world tourists for its serene backwaters and scenic beauty. However, among the socio- economic scientists

around the world, Kerala is renowned for its Development model. They took notice of this small state when its developmental model constantly started featuring in various international journals, especially when it inspired economists like Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen and others in their works related to HDI.

The state came into existence in 1956 November First as a result of the state re- organisation Act (Kannan, 1999). Kerala is home to 2.76% of India's population. As per 2011 census, it consists of 14 districts, 63 taluks, 520 towns and 1018 villages. The total population is 3, 34, 06,061 out of which 1, 73, 78,649 are females, and Kerala is the only state in India which has more females than males (Menon-Sen and Shivakumar, 2001) besides Puducherry a Union territory. Kerala's pro-female bias has been evident in all the census carried out till date. The majority speaks the Malayalam language. The state enjoys comparatively higher socio- economic development indicators like high literacy, high life expectancy and high standard of living, despite having lower per capita income. Falling birth rate, infant and maternal mortality rate and the advancements made in the fields of health and education are all pointed towards the success of Kerala Model Development (Mohanty, 1995). While boasting of its higher standard of living, Kerala is yet to find a way to tackle increasing suicidal rate and alcoholism. Well-educated Kerala youth's preference to work abroad created a massive jump in the average age of the population. Increased life expectancy is also contributed significantly towards an ageing population.

Nearly 50% of its population depends on agriculture to meet both ends. The eastern region includes high mountain ranges and deep forests. People in this region are engaged in coffee or tea plantation mainly. Kerala is popularly known as "Spice Garden" of India as it produces and exports a variety of spices. Nearly 84% of the total natural rubber produced in India is also from Kerala (Karunakaran, 2017). The production of rice -one of the major food crops- falls because of increased production costs and levelling of paddy fields for construction purposes. People residing in Kerala's long coastal region depend on fishing and related industries to make a living.

The researcher conducted her study in Kottayam District of Kerala, popularly known as "Akshara Nagari" which means "city of letters" because of its close association with literature and print media. Its exposure to the world of literature started way back in the early 19th century. The city's effort was widely recognized when it achieved 100% literacy in 1989 (The Hindu Business Line, July 1, 2014). The presence of Christian Missionaries and educationalist Banchamin Baily in the

area was a significant boost for the academic arena. He established CMS printing press in Kottayam town which was the first one in Kerala (keralaculture.org). The credit for starting English education and the very first college in Kerala belong to Kottayam district. By the middle of the 20th century, Kottayam became, home to different publishing houses and the only Cooperative Society of writers, authors and Publishers (SPCS).

Geographically, Kottayam is situated a little South to Central Kerala and is sharing borders with Ernakulam district in the North, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts in the South. Its western boundary Vembanadu Kayal (lake) is one of the major tourist attractions in central Kerala. A cruise in the backwaters of Vembanadu Lake is absolutely a divine experience. The district has a tropical climate characterised by hot temperature during summer. The district gets plenty of rainfall throughout the year. Its total population is 1,974, 551 out of which 1,006,262 are females (Census,2011). The city has recorded a positive sex ratio in the last census with 1039 females for 1000 males. The census recorded an average literacy rate of 97.21% with a female literacy rate of 96.48%. In this district, 49.81% of Hindus, 43.48% of Christians and 6.41 of Muslims along with other minority religions are peacefully coexisting for decades.

The city is one of the major trade centres of spices and natural rubber. Majority of the people here are engaged in rubber cultivation. The ample presence of three "L"s, lakes, letters and latex has earned another pet name for this city, "Land of Letters, Lakes and Latex". The culture here is a mixture of both midland countryside and the Malanadu hilly area, enveloped in greenery with a clean and unpolluted atmosphere. Acres of Rubber plantations along the banks of River Meenachil have a peculiar role in determining people's living standard here. They enjoyed a high standard of living when the rubber price has skyrocketed during 2010-12. However, recently when the rubber prices touched an all-time low, the middle- class rubber farmers started struggling to meet both ends. Increased labour charges further added to the woes of the farmers. Descendants of Tamil workers who made their home here to work in the rubber plantations are also working in the plantations around the area. Mostly lower-middle- class people here work in rubber plantations.

1.9. Statement of the Problem

The publication of “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, had popularized the idea of gender justice and equality. Women had fought long and tedious battles with traditional male-centric systems to reach where they are now. For enfranchisement, equal

pay, rightful share in the political representation and the like, women had to wage long battles and tasted success in most of them. However, the efforts of enhancing women's political representation had not yielded expected outcomes even now. In the case of the average percentage of women Parliamentarians as of February 2019, according to UNWOMEN none of the countries except Rwanda which has a decent 61.3% in their Lower House, crossed the '50%' cap. Trailing behind are Nordic countries with 42.5%, Americas with 30.6%, Europe excluding Nordic countries with 27.2%, if combine percentages of single, lower and upper houses. When it comes to the specific case of India, as on May 2019 it has 14.39% women Parliamentarians in its Lower House and 11.48% in its Upper House as on July 2018.

The absence of women from crucial decision making is found to be a deterrent in women's empowerment. Recognizing mere removal of a few structural barriers that prevent women from political participation will not yield the desired result, many scholars argued for the introduction of electoral quotas. It not only ensured women's participation in political decision making but also provided them with a constitutional platform to stand up to men and raise their voice against injustices that too in a fast-track manner. Out of a numerous route for introducing quotas, Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2003:20) identify two distinct models named "from below" approach as in Scandinavian countries where quotas are "introduced after a history of gradual integration of women into public life" and "from above" approach where "quotas are introduced from above". Gaventa (2006: 26) quotes the work of Cornwall and Coelho (2006) to define "democratic spaces in which citizens can engage to claim citizenship and affect governance processes" and then introduces the concept of 'invited spaces' wherein "people are invited to participate by the various kinds of authorities in the process of decision making". Hence, reservation efforts can be seen as opening up of 'invited spaces' where women are invited to make their contributions towards the process of nation-building with confidence and authority. Since it is introduced by a higher authority/government, the approach is "from above". Such models are found to be fast-tracking women's entry into politics. India too adopted such a model in 1993 by enacting 73rd and 74th amendment act that guaranteed a minimum 33% seats for women in all LSGIs across the country. Later many States increased this cap up to 50%.

The prospect of involving citizens in the process of governance has been projected as a significant tool for social development globally as it has the potential to transform the way citizens and the

state interact with each other. It not only produces better citizens but ensures better governance also. Cornwall (2002:ii) says, “enhancing participation in development is equivalent to ‘reconfiguring’ the space between citizens and the democratic institutions that affect their lives. Reconfiguring means ‘positioning’ citizens in newly emergent political and policy arenas, and ‘repositioning’ them with regard to older institutions, of ‘traditional’ governance as well as of the ‘modern’ state”. The interaction between the state and the citizens should be reconfigured in such a way that it adds to the accountability and responsibility of elected representatives in the public sphere. Gaventa (2006:26) says the ‘space’ here is nothing but all those “opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests”. So, a definition of empowerment having spatial connotations is worth mentioning here as the concept of ‘space’ started featuring in the literature related to power, political participation and governance. Quoting from Price-Chalita (1994:239) Cornwall (2002) defines empowerment “*as a process through which oppressed people recognize and begin to use their agency; creating new spaces, occupying existing spaces, or revalorizing negatively-labelled spaces*”.

Affirmative action measures to impart female perspectives in legislatures have been carried out either by imposing a voluntary or compulsory electoral quota for women. The quota system is nothing but a state crafted ‘invited space’ envisaged to ensure women’s participation in political administration. Under the quota system, women are entitled to get a fixed share of political leadership which in turn would increase their representation. The proposal to give constitutional status to the allocated quota is aimed at restraining political parties and other institutions from watering down the reservation system further. While the proponents of quota system hope that, this system will bring in the much needed ‘gender balance’ into our political sphere by reducing women’s under-representation, the detractors believe it contradicts ‘the equal opportunity for all’ motto of our constitution and women’s inexperience in the field of politics may adversely affect its quality. However, if the invited space, is a creation of a powerful agency, it will definitely carry its maker’s ‘signature’ delimiting the participants’ influence and authority, forcing the beneficiaries to stay within the boundaries set by its designers as mere invitees. Besides, there will be influential people within the community who may act as ‘protectors’ of power, reinforcing the practices of exclusion. Therefore, it is essential to design the newly created space with the utmost

care and with sufficient autonomy. This study analysis if women still remain as “mere invitees” or if they could penetrate deeply into the traditional male-dominant political field confidently.

Irrespective of the ‘cons’ mentioned above there are many takers for the quota system who believe that it is a perfect way to provide a much deserved “jump-start” for aspiring women politicians compensating the injustice done to them. Authors like Devika and Kawlra (2012) drawing from the political participation theories of Cornwall (2002) and Mirftab (2004) compare reservation to an ‘invited space’ provided by government legally to enhance women’s political empowerment. However, the real empowerment happens only when they become capable enough to ‘invent’ a space for themselves within which women could exercise their political agency absolutely free from patriarchal influences. Hence, it can be said that through the interaction and movement between these spaces of invitation and invention, the practice of citizenship becomes politically effective. For this, an enabling environment needs to be created wherein women are free from all sorts of discrimination and free to access all relevant information. Giving them opportunities to take part in political activities before their official entry into politics makes them confident.

As Cornwall and Goetz (2005:788) suggest, *“an apprenticeship in democratic practices is useful because it offers them a training in the ability to mount an argument and do debate effectively, to tolerate opposition and to accept setbacks and failures”*. Though we have no shortage for women activists, when the time comes for them to be actively involved in representative politics, they are seemed to be reluctant. No matter how political parties vouch for women empowerment, for most of them, lady leaders are just ‘foot soldiers’ and are not suitable for top leadership positions within the party. If a woman gets a top position in a party through personal or family connections, the chances are high that, she may never ‘voice’ her concerns about women issues contradicting her party’s views. The onus is now on the feminists to develop a distinct political community of women who are aware of the advantages of having a fair number of women in formal political bodies. Therefore, opening up of new democratic spaces that offer new learning and networking opportunities for women will help them to overcome the challenges in the political field. Formation of women self-help groups can be beneficial for women as it provides them opportunities to expand their economic, social and political capabilities and many scholars in the field believe that it can be used as a political training ground for them. The self-help group initiatives like Kudumbashree Mission by the government of Kerala has not only addressed the poverty issue among women but

in fact, it created an enabling environment wherein women could be flourished into full-blown political leaders. As Gavanta (2006:27) points out “*power gained in one space, through new skills, capacity and experiences could be useful to enter and affect other spaces as well*”. If this is the case, a Kudumbashree member can utilise all her newly acquired skills and capacities to enter and survive in other invited spaces also.

While the promoters of Women Reservation Act believe such an act is essential for active political participation of women and actively push for it hoping it would enhance the number of women Parliamentarians, its detractors argue reservation would not help anyone but the rich and elite with political ties. Many political parties firmly believe that conceding political power to an elitist section of the society may hamper the growth of marginalized and vulnerable people further. Obviously, making our democracy inclusive of women all on a sudden by adding to their total number may not necessarily improve their quality of political participation. Therefore, Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2003) recommend comprehensive capacity enhancement programmes for the newly elected women representatives to ensure their quality of participation is not compromised due to their sudden entry into politics. Similarly, Gavanta (2006: 27) suggests creating additional spaces of citizen participation, hoping people can, in fact, make use of the skills and knowledge developed in one space to enter and survive in another space. If it is so, the researcher feels that women’s involvement with Kudumbashree- a state crafted space where women, mainly from the lower socio-economic background, are invited to participate in activities targeted to empower them holistically- should be able to help them to enter into Panchayati Raj Institutions, another invited space crafted by the State and to improve their quality of political participation once they elected.

With or without Kudumbashree, more than a million women suddenly found themselves in the political forefront, setting aside their reluctance due to this mandatory reservation policy. However, the political entry of women with no political back up or those who belong to poor or marginalized groups remained difficult. Even if they find seats for themselves based on mandatory reservation rules, they might end up as proxies of their husbands or influential political ‘Netas’. Here, the researcher is arguing that through Kudumbashree activities, women’s political consciousness can be raised and thus, women would take up challenging positions willingly in local self-governments not because of the compulsion from others instead, they feel it is their duty to build up a nation free from gender discrimination and corruption. Therefore, the researcher

highlights growth stories of a few women and their gradual progression from ordinary lower/middle-class women to public figure through their active involvement with Kudumbashree. Apart from that, this research is intended to shed light on the extent of transformation experienced by each one of the elected women representatives irrespective of their Kudumbashree membership, their intentions and motives to stay on in the politics for the long haul and the obstacles on their way to political leadership.

1.10. The Objective

This study examines the role of Kudumbashree in politically empowering lower- middle-class women in Kottayam district of Kerala and to analyze how this empowerment translates into strong leadership in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

The specific objectives are as follows;

- To assess the transformation of women from politically invisible entities to visible and robust political entities after the implementation of women reservation in Panchayats.
- To find out if Kudumbashree plays a substantial role, in bringing out women from lower socio-economic strata into political forefront.
- To assess (in the cases of Kudumbashree empowered members) the gradual progression from ordinary lower-middle-class women to financially independent entities through Kudumbashree activities and later to become women representatives in the Panchayat.
- To find the extent to which their involvement with Kudumbashree mission helped them to exercise their agency effectively while discharging their duties as Panchayat members/president.
- To find out if there is a relationship between their increased social visibility as a result of their Kudumbashree activities and their increased political consciousness.
- To know more about the stories behind the political entry of women without Kudumbashree and women with Kudumbashree.

- To compare the extent of transformation experienced by Kudumbashree empowered panchayat members and Non-Kudumbashree members.

1.11. Research Questions

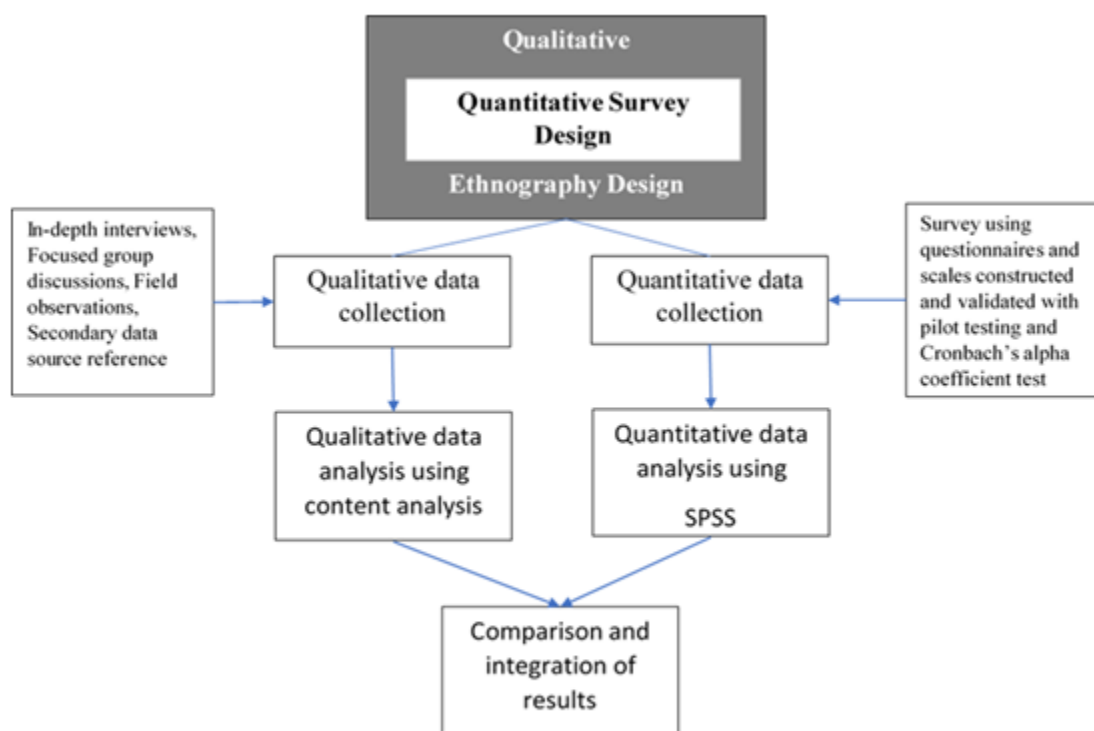
The study relied on the following research questions;

- To what extent can Kudumbashree be used as a tool for instilling political consciousness among its participants?
- How does women's exposure in the Kudumbashree help them to exercise their political agency in a more effective way?
- Does Kudumbashree inspire women to climb up the political ladder and to stay in political limelight longer?
- To what extent, Kudumbashree members utilize the 'invited' space of political reservation to invent a 'space' for themselves to gain political individuation?
- Do women without Kudumbashree face any difficulties, especially during their first term?
- Do women with Kudumbashree prefer to stay back in this field rather than returning to their previous lives?

1.12. Methodology

Within a transformative framework, this study adopted an Embedded Mixed Method (EMM) research design, in which a supportive quantitative study is embedded in a primarily qualitative study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The researcher mixed the quantitative strand into the qualitative part while analyzing the concurrently collected data in such a way that the quantitative data complements the qualitative strand towards the outcome of the study. In this study the researcher embedded a quantitative survey design into a qualitative ethnography design as shown in the concept map below:

Figure 1.1 Concept Map for Embedded Design



Concept map for the Embedded Mixed Methodology

Ethnography is a qualitative method of studying a culture-sharing group by exploring the day-to-day life of participants through field observations and in-depth interviews wherein an ethnographer analyses and interprets the patterns of values, beliefs and behaviours that learned and shared by the group (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Different from the traditional approach to ethnography, a critical approach developed in response to the structural changes in society (Carspecken & Apple, 1992) for a better understanding of the changing system of power. A critical ethnographer advocate for the emancipation of marginalized groups (Thomas, 1993) studying the 'experiences of interlocutors' (Madison, 2019) to understand issues of power, dominance, inequality and empowerment (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Therefore, to study the political empowerment of women in Kottayam district of Kerala, the researcher adopted a critical ethnography and embedded a survey design within it, providing a fullness to the study.

The transformative framework considers a broad range of people who are rejected from the mainstream of the society, and this paradigm states that the realities constructed socially are influenced by power and privilege (Mertens, 2009). A transformative lens facilitated the researcher to look into women's efforts to move on to the centre stage from the periphery of power, making use of the privileges granted by women reservation in local body governance and capacity building through Kudumbashree. Furthermore, it analysed the degree to which the women in power could shake off the shackles of patriarchy to play an equal role in society with dignity. Finally, with this transformative world view, this study proposes ideas to ensure a complete integration of women into the mainstream of society by providing equal opportunities and exposure to children regardless of gender or class or caste through their stages of development.

The first section of the interview schedules developed especially for this study dealt with the questions related to the respondents' socio-economic and their familial background and is followed by another section of closed-ended questions modelled as Likert-like items with options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree which helped the researcher to draw information regarding different aspects of the participants' lives before entering into the field of politics and thereafter. Though it is modelled as a closed-ended section, the participants were encouraged to share their stories during personal interviews as the study leans more towards the qualitative aspect of the problem. According to Charmaz (2006:19), it is important for a qualitative analyst, to derive a careful interpretive understanding of the participants' lives rather than adopting or reproducing

their views as our own. Therefore, the last section of the interview schedules designed as an open-ended one which provided maximum space for the participants to share their perspectives on matters related to the studied problem, and also it enabled the researcher to view their world through their eyes.

1.12.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study uses one of the widely discussed theories in social work, person- in-environment or PIE theory which argues that an individual is the product of his/her environment whose problems and issues can be identified by analyzing his/her environment. Weiss-Gal, (2014:65) quotes Hare (2004) *“the person-in-environment approach views the individual and his or her multiple environments as a dynamic, interactive system, in which each component simultaneously affects and is affected by the other”*. The impact of environmental influences in one’s upbringing will last forever, and it reflects on each of his or her ‘choices’ they make later in their lives as well. This theory also recognizes and respects an individual’s ability to solve his/her problems if he/she has been given ample opportunities later in their lives to compensate for all those missed or lost ones in the past. This process can be further enhanced by modifying one’s environment through effecting social reforms targeting the removal of social and other obstacles that prevent an individual from realizing his/her potential fully. Based on this theory this study seeks answers for questions like how women are being sidelined by denying them opportunities to be fully integrated into the society, how SHGs are helping them to restore all those missed opportunities and finally how reforms like reservation can be of help in reducing this inequality.

A woman’s decision-making power is influenced heavily by various factors, including her family background and social norms. For example, if she is born in a wealthy family and to educated parents, she may find herself surrounded by plenty of “choices’ throughout her life. However, the case may be different for an ordinary woman living in a patriarchal family, whose life is often controlled by male heirs in the family. For her biological family, a girl is someone who leaves sooner or later to her conjugal home leaving behind ageing parents. So, any investment on her can be seen as “dead” without much ‘returns’.

As Martha Nussbaum (2000:1) points out, “*women are less well-nourished than men, less healthy..... and are much less likely than men to be literate and still less likely to have professional or technical education*”. They usually have to make compromises in matters related to their education, job, marriage and number and spacing between children on account of their inferior gender. There is no wonder if a western philosopher like Nussbaum feels that our womenfolk are incapable of leading lives that are fully human, after seeing the resource crunch faced by middle-class women in India. From a very young age itself, our women are trained to be content with the limited number of choices they have, and they are seemingly happy to accept whatever life throws at them, be it an early marriage or staying in an abusive marriage. This is where Amartya Sen’s capability approach comes in handy, in which he rejects the idea of evaluations based on utilities, resources or income and prefers the idea of evaluating a person’s overall freedom to lead the life that a person has reasons to value (Robeyns, 2003). Frediani (2010:175) quotes Sen (2005:5) as saying, “*a functioning is an achievement of a person: what he or she manages to do or to be, and any such functioning reflects, as it were, a part of the state that person* (Sen 2005:5).” In the words of Gore(1997), ‘functionings’, are nothing but achievements, ‘capabilities’ are nothing but opportunity set. Sen (1992) prefers to evaluate one’s well-being within the space of capabilities or opportunity sets instead of his/her achievements. Devika (2010:269) points out that, it is important to have both capacity and ability, which nurtures each other to produce desired results. She says, “*lack of ability (Praapti in Malayalam) can erode existing capacity*” (Patrata in Malayalam), and two words together make capability which could be the antecedent of Sen’s Capability approach since it essentially defines “*capability as a combination of capacity and access to resources and ability*”. Lack of either of them will affect the quality of the expected outcome.

And it should be noted that each person potentially differs from others in their ability to transform their opportunity sets into accomplishments (Sen, 1985b and Frediani, 2010). In addition to this having multiple “choices” (irrespective of one’s ability to use it) and his or her “freedom” to choose from a pool of ‘choices’, definitely enhance one’s well-being or quality of life. To improve the quality of a woman’s life, she should be given ample ‘choices’ and must be capable of selecting the ‘best’ one which offers her the best possible outcome. Hence, we can say that a woman’s quality of life can be improved if she is capable of making the right decisions at the right time.

The process of ‘human development’ involves “enlarging the choices of people” (UNDP 1990:10). Having multiple ‘choices’ to expand knowledge, live healthy and acquire wealth not only ensure a better living standard but also serve as a base for a harmonious society. Amartya Sen (1984:497) refers to “the range of options (choices) a person has in deciding what kind of a life to lead” as capabilities. Therefore, he views “development as capability expansion” (2003:3). Enhancing women’s capabilities by improving their accessibility to credit facilities, creating constitutional provisions for political participation and eliminating gender disparities in the field of education, workforce participation and the like contribute substantially to their empowerment. It can be conceptualized in terms of resources, agency and achievements (Kabeer 1999a). While the first dimension of power, ‘resources’-include all sorts of material, social and human resources all of which influence one’s ability to exercise his/her ‘choice’, the second dimension of power, ‘agency’ is the ability of a woman to act for herself with accountability and self-confidence. And this “agency approach” recognizes women as active agents of social transformation (Sen 1999:191).

For exercising agency effectively, one needs to be economically independent. Having ‘own’ income increases one’s bargaining power as well as access to services considerably and the importance of which has been discussed widely in all the feminist movements across the world. From Susan B Antony, who popularized the slogan a “purse of their own” to Nobel laureate Esther Duflo (2012) insisted on the financial independence of women. Expanding women’s rights and better enforcement of the rights have been found beneficial to women’s agency. Various studies suggest an improvement in the quality of life at both individual and family level if women were given ample opportunities to exercise their agency. Amartya Sen in one of his books titled ‘Development as Freedom’ (1999) relates Kerala’s higher socio- economic indicators to women’s agency. According to him, Kerala may have achieved this status by allowing its women to strengthen their agency by providing them with better educational opportunities. He associates Kerala’s lower fertility rate, reduced child mortality and improved female workforce participation with women’s agency.

Since the theory mentioned above is said to be highly individualistic, it is important to discuss its scope of application in the context of “capability expansion” happening by the collectivization of poor women as in Kudumbashree. In developing countries like India, poor people find it easier to achieve desired results when they pool in all their resources and cooperate. Ibrahim (2006:398),

introduces a new term called “collective capabilities”, and he defines it as “*the newly generated functioning bundles a person obtains by virtue of his/her engagement in a collectivity that help her/him achieve the life he/she has reasons to value*”. It differs from the individual capabilities in two aspects; firstly, collective capabilities are essentially a function of collective action, and secondly, the beneficiaries of the newly generated collective capabilities would be the collectivity at large. We can say that these are newly generated ‘choices’ acquired by group participants on account of their group participation. Sen (2002) agrees with the environmental influence on individuals and also acknowledges the importance of public reasoning and democratic processes in framing capability approach. However, Sen disagrees with the concept of “*collective capabilities*” as he believes in using the group as an instrument for gaining individual empowerment.

Those who are in favour of the notion of collective capability not only acknowledge the instrumental value of collective agency and freedom but also vouch for its intrinsic importance in designing and formulating one’s perception of good. Though individual actions may bring in positive social changes in the society, collective actions and collective agency are proved to be beneficial for the poor in bringing about sustainable and quicker positive social and political changes. Since the potential benefits of forming self-help groups outweigh the potential hazards; the idea is constantly being used in developing countries to reinforce human capabilities. Moreover, the idea of organising women into Consciousness-Raising Groups has been widely used in the 1960s during Women Liberty Movement that challenged male supremacy by adopting a Pro-Woman line by refusing to blame the individual woman for her oppression (Hanisch, 2006). The slogan raised in this movement, “the Personal is Political”, is still relevant as feminists believe whether or not their problems seemed irrelevant to those who around them, the solution must be sought through collective action. Similarly, Kudumbashree enables women to collectivise them, and this movement derives its strength from its participants’ unity to seek a political solution for their problems.

Many studies by various scholars like John (2009), Williams et al., (2011), Thampi and Devika (2007), and Shihabudheen (2013) have noted that initiatives of Kerala government like Kudumbashree, are instrumental in providing multiple ‘options’ to women to become economically independent and politically active citizens of the country with a higher social status.

"Resources and agency together constitute capabilities" (Kabeer,1999b:4). Kudumbashree has been helping women in Kerala by mobilizing material, human and social resources for their all-round development and also in creating an environment conducive to exercise their agency since its official launch in 17th May 1998. Hence, one can safely assume that Kudumbashree movement plays a significant role in empowering women across Kerala by, expanding their socio-economic and political capabilities, enabling them to make independent choices, and encouraging them to follow their own course of actions independently with self- confidence. Devika and Thampi (2012: 199) noted that *"women's gentle power and knowledge of rules"* are two crucial factors which determine their success in politics. If it is so, Kudumbashree provides them ample opportunities to enhance their 'knowledge of rules' regarding different procedures of the Panchayat and trains them to exercise their power more convincingly and authoritatively. Therefore, Kudumbashree like initiatives could be seen as 'schools of democracy' wherein future women leaders can pick up basics of political processes through participatory methods and the basics lessons of handling the power relations within an institution. Through this study, the researcher proves that the constant interaction between two invited spaces Kudumbashree (a state- sponsored invited space for enhancing women's empowerment) and the reservation in PRIs (another state-sponsored invited space to improve women's political presence) deliver an 'invented' space wherein women can nurture their political dreams further. As stated earlier, the Person- in- Environment theory recognizes and respects the ability of women to be change agents. Therefore, in this context, the spaces mentioned above can be considered as 'tools for environmental modification' that help women to rise above all the obstacles in their environment.

1.12.2. Purpose Statement

This study explores the role of Kudumbashree in politically empowering women in the Kottayam District of Kerala by analyzing the extent of transformation experienced by the elected women representatives of the Gram Panchayats. This study analyzed respondents' *lived experiences* ** in relation to the 'choices' they had been given to expand their socio-economic and political capabilities prior to their political entry, through a feminist lens. Also, it pursued an explanation as to why women remain as willful propagators of patriarchy even in the postmodern era.

**lived experiences: - personal experiences of a person including the wisdom they have gained from such experiences.*

Since this study aimed thorough analysis of the research questions mentioned above, it relays on a mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis. The interview schedules are prepared in such a way that it enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. Here, the quantitative data is used in such a way that it complements the interpretation of the qualitative data.

Furthermore, the study calls up for a complete revamp of the current system in which we bring up our children, especially girls, without giving adequate opportunities to be politically vigilant and aware. Therefore, this embedded mixed-method research possesses a transformative world view. To be precise, this study falls under the transformative research paradigm as it discusses the underlying causes of women's exclusion from the political field and identifies this as a discriminative practice against them. Finally, it proposes ways and means to ensure their integration into the mainstream.

1.12.3 Hypothesis

- Exposure to the activities of Kudumbashree significantly improves the quality of political participation of women.
- Kudumbashree experience inspires women to stay back in politics for a longer period.

1.12.4 Scope of the Study

A significant number of studies have offered different ways and means of empowering women politically and talked in great length about the need for improving their number in political decision-making bodies. However, in reality, women are still underrepresented and marginalized in the political sphere. Recent literature identifies the potential of women self-help groups to attract more women into politics. The exposure given to them through different types of capacity building programmes in such groups is found to be inspiring women to take up politics as a career choice. Besides, women's economic, social and political status are also found to be improved significantly once they started working with self-help groups (Thileepan and Soundarya Rajan, 2014; Sudipta and Debnarayan, 2011; Yogendrarajah, 2013; Shihabudheen, 2013; Jacob John, 2009). However, none of those studies showcased an ordinary woman's journey from silence to articulation, through their lived experiences.

Knowing the extent of women's political empowerment due to their active involvement with SHGs will be a boost for both supporters of SHG movement and those who argue for 33% reservation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The researcher intended to prove that, a woman who had leadership experience with Kudumbashree has the capacity to lead a panchayat/ municipality or even a state without being a proxy to her husband or a political party and she exercises her agency with much more confidence compared to a direct entrant into politics. The researcher hopes to use the positive findings of the study to spread awareness regarding the need of women's reservation in upper and lower houses and do her best to convince all the political parties who stand unitedly in opposing the women reservation bill in Lok Sabha. However, this study brought out a few drawbacks in the system as well, which may deter women's fight for equal representation in the field of politics if left unresolved.

Besides, this study shed light on the impact of limited choices in a girl's life during her formative years, particularly on their fortitude to pursue politics later in their life. This dimension of the study sets a guideline to bring up children providing the equivalent social exposure and development opportunities regardless of their gender, foreseeing their equal participation in the political process. This study calls for further researches in this domain to measure the momentum of women empowerment and to bring about gender equality in our society. Therefore, all the respondents irrespective of their Kudumbashree background are interviewed in-depth to know if they had been given ample opportunities to get themselves involved in political processes during their formative years.

1.12.5. The Sample Frame and Sample Size

The researcher selected the Kottayam district of Kerala, using 'purposive sampling' (Etikan et al., 2016) considering its high literacy rate and the existence of active Kudumbashree units throughout the district. Kottayam is the first district to achieve 100% literacy in Kerala in 1989. Stromquist (2005) quotes a study by Egbo (2000) which found a significant positive correlation between political participation and literacy. According to this study, illiterates suffer from lower self-esteem and therefore refrain from fully participating in public activities, while literates engage in such activities confidently and make autonomous decisions. Besides, people of Kerala tend to elect those women who have experience in running institutions like schools, colleges or retired government officials (Devika and Thampi 2012). Apparently, women here are expected to have

high educational status and knowledge regarding rules and regulations compared to the other regions. Since Kottayam is generally considered as a forward district with comparatively high living standard, it was anticipated to help in verifying social variables; health statistics and education as accelerating factors for the political involvement of women. As a matter of fact, it is pivotal to select an area with socio-economic indicators higher than average to study the extent of women empowerment to identify how effectively they translate into political leadership as we are expecting the passage of women reservation bill in the parliament in the near future.

Kottayam district is divided into 11 block panchayats, therefore, the researcher selected one panchayat each from all the blocks using 'random sampling' (Levy and Lemeshow, 2013) method and identified all women elected representatives in those panchayats. They formed the basis of the sample. To be precise, the unit of the study was an elected woman representative in one of the selected Gram Panchayats in Kottayam District. Out of a total of 93 respondents, 59 were with Kudumbashree background and the rest 34, were without Kudumbashree. In Kerala local body election of 2015, 11851(lsgkerala.gov.in) women elected to its 1200 LSGIs, and among them, 7376 are Kudumbashree members (kudumbashree.org). This study conducted in Kottayam district of Kerala deeply inquired into the life of 93 women panchayat members with 63.44% representation of Kudumbashree women.

1.12.6 Tools for Data Collection and Scale

The researcher has made use of both primary and secondary data sources. Two sets of interview schedules (Annexures I&II) guided the researcher to conduct in-depth one-to-one interviews. Those were prepared in such a way that it allowed the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Out of the two sets of interview schedules, the first one was used for eliciting information from respondents who had entered into politics after a reasonable time with Kudumbashree, ahead of their representation in Gram Panchayat and the second one was for those who came into Gram Panchayat directly. Besides, participant observation and focused group discussions (FGDs) with the help of a Performa (Annexure IV), were also employed to make the data richer and inclusive. In order to get a deep understanding of the participants' emotional state and the meanings of their actions, it is essential to know the contexts in which they take such actions. Therefore, the researcher visited them multiple times and earned their trust by talking to them. Fieldwork notes and observation diary enabled the researcher to look back and ponder on

certain aspects of their lives later during data analysis. The researcher interviewed 54 key-informants, including male elected representatives, staff in the Panchayat, Kudumbashree members and a few prominent political leaders in the selected area. A fact-finding information sheet (Annexure III) was also employed to collect general information about each of the selected panchayat. Out of those 54 key informants, 11 of them—one from each of the 11 selected panchayats helped the researcher to fill out the fact-finding information sheet. To elaborate on the results, the researcher included 12 case studies as well. All the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Malayalam and later translated into English. The secondary data was collected from various government records and other sources, including journals, reference books, statements from public figures and the internet.

To find out if Kudumbashree exposure significantly improves the quality of their political participation statistically, the researcher constructed two 5-point scales with options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The first scale which consisted of five items measured their valour and resilience to withstand familial/political pressure. The second scale which consisted of 3 items measured their confidence with which they occupy the space that was once considered as a traditional male bastion. The reliability of the aforesaid scales had been ensured by pilot testing and its internal consistency by a statistical technique known as Cronbach's alpha coefficient which indicates the average correlation among all of the items in the scale. The result ranges from 0 to 1, ensures the reliability of the scale (Pallant, 2005:6). However, according to Nunnally (1978), the ideal value for Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be 0.7 and above depends on the total number of items in the scale. In the present study, the researcher checked the Cronbach's alpha coefficient separately for both scales and obtained the values 0.76 and 0.7 respectively and thus ensured the reliability of the scale statistically.

1.12.7 Data Analysis

Since the study relied on both quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously, the researcher used two different approaches in the data analysis. To understand quantitative data, the researcher primarily depended on software packages SPSS and Microsoft Excel. When it comes to the analysis of the rich data collected after qualitative interviews, the researcher identified certain themes initially. In the case of a participant with Kudumbashree exposure, the themes identified for content analysis were their lived experiences as 1) Non-Kudumbashree and

non-politicians 2) Kudumbashree members 3) blooming politicians. And in the case of participants without Kudumbashree exposure, the researcher categorized clues that explain their lived experiences under two themes as 1) non-politicians 2) blooming politicians. These themes included various sub- themes as well. The qualitative interviews with Key Informants identified following themes public speaking skills, conflict resolution skills, ability to adapt to new circumstances, ability to take up women centred issues, problem-solving skills, level of involvement in panchayat meetings and their social reach, to compare the performance of elected representatives with/without Kudumbashree.

1.12.8 Measures to Ensure validity and Reliability

Creswell and Miller (2000) identify *“validity as one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, or the readers of an account”* (Creswell, 2014:313). To ensure the present study’s trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility, the researcher depended on varied data sources and data gathering tools. The personal interviews conducted during February to June 2018, was followed up by another session during April to June of 2019 to ensure its accuracy and the themes that evolved during the first session were reaffirmed during this visit. Focus group discussions with participants who belonged to diverse backgrounds were also conducted during this period to understand their perspectives also. Most of the interviews and FGDs were conducted in Gram Panchayat offices except the ones with Kudumbashree members. Those group discussions were carried out in Kudumbashree offices of the respective panchayats. The researcher met the majority of the influential leaders in their homes. At each stage of her study, the researcher met her guide for course correction. Based upon her valuable suggestions, she redesigned the interview schedules after the pilot study in Teekoy Gram Panchayat.

1.12.9 Triangulation

Triangulation helps the researcher to comprehend data from different perspectives (Carter et al., 2014) and to rule out measurement oversights. The goal of triangulation is in- depth understanding of the issue (Denzin, 2015). The researcher studied 12 cases for an accurate understanding of the pattern of themes developed from analysis of data collected through field observation, in-depth interviews of participants, focused group discussion and secondary data source reference. Case study enabled a cross-checking of data to avoid errors in measurements.

1.12.10 Ethical Considerations

“Ethical behaviour helps protect individuals, communities and environments and offers the potential to increase the sum of good in the world” (Israel and Hay, 2006:2). Keeping this in mind, the researcher tried her best to avoid ‘leading’ questions and refrained from saying something which may hurt their religious or party ‘sentiments’. By asking open-ended and non-judgmental questions, the researcher left maximum space to the respondents to open up and share their stories during case study interviews. To all the respondents, the researcher elaborately explained the purpose of the study and made sure that each one of them understood that the collected data would be used only for academic purpose. Participation in this research was voluntary. While scheduling one to one interview, the researcher tried her best to fix a place and time based on the participant’s convenience. Before entering into the formal conversations as part of the data collection, the researcher had an informal session with each one of them to earn their trust and to establish rapport. Moreover, the researcher refrained from revealing her political biases and gave utmost respect to the views expressed by the participants. To respect the privacy of the participants, the researcher assigned false names while analyzing the collected data.

1.12.11 Limitations of the Study

The period of data collection was restricted between February 2018 to June 2019, including a pilot study. Only existing members of Gram Panchayats were chosen to be studied. Those women leaders who have been involved in politics actively but not as elected members were excluded from the study using the interview schedules. However, the researcher included a few of them as Key Informants. Even though the area has self-help groups under various charitable organizations, the current study focuses only on Kudumbashree members.

1.12.12 Chapter Schema

The first chapter deals with a general introduction to the topic, including the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, objective of the study, methodology, limitations of the study and ethical considerations. The second chapter deals with the review of all available literature connected to the topic of research. The third chapter is an attempt to trace the history of women’s political participation in Kerala. The fourth chapter provides an overall idea about the evolution and growth of the Kudumbashree Mission in Kerala. The fifth chapter deals with the socio-

economic background of the respondents. The sixth chapter, “*On the Wings of Kudumbashree*” discusses the respondents’ lives as active Kudumbashree members. Also, this chapter compares the activities, confidence level, political awareness, public speaking skills and the likes of Kudumbashree empowered elected representatives with direct entrants. The seventh chapter, ‘*The Transformation*’ highlights the changes in their lives after becoming the elected representatives and their coping mechanisms to challenges and an overview of their life as an active political participant. The eighth chapter deals with the summary of the findings, suggestions and the conclusion.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

An attempt has been made to collect and review literature related to women's status in general, their level of empowerment in the social, political and economic arena and the evolution of Kudumbashree. The first part of this chapter discusses how and why women are more prone to poverty compared to men and also analyses how such vulnerabilities prevent them from living a life that they reasonably value and enjoy (Sen, 1999). The second part discusses how women are being kept away from active politics over the centuries and the importance of empowering them with more political, social and economic opportunities and how Kudumbashree like initiatives can be used as a tool to transform their lives. The last part highlights the research gap.

2.2 Women and Poverty

Poverty is one of the harshest realities in the world. Irrespective of all the efforts to curb the evil effects of poverty, it continues to grow and haunt the collective consciousness of humanity. It considerably diminishes their capabilities to lead a life they perceived as valuable Sen (1999). Once born into poverty, it is tough to get out of it as it limits one's capacity to have a better education, work and better healthcare. Therefore, poverty is said to be a vicious circle. Sometimes, several generations have to suffer from the evil effects of poverty. Poor are vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and violence. Poverty affects families, societies and even countries. Generally, the evil effects of poverty range from social isolation to poor self-esteem and confidence (The Women's Budget Group WBG, 2008).

According to Nilufer Cagatay, (UNDP report "Gender and Poverty", 1998) women are the ones who suffer the most from poverty because of their difficulty in converting their capabilities into income or well-being due to various reasons like their time constraints, their lesser command over asset and income, restrictions to undertake some kind of work, their inability to control their own labour, their reproductive responsibilities, and they are more likely to be affected by transient poverty. In addition to all these limitations, women in India have to face many other social, religious and cultural restrictions also unlike their western counterparts (Nussbaum, 2000) and have to fight for their legal and political rights constantly.

According to Nilufer Cagatay (1998), women even in middle-income families also experience poverty due to gender bias in the allocation of resources within their families. The World Bank Policy Research Report titled 'Engendering Development' (2001: xi), links *"poverty with large disparities in basic human rights in resources and economic opportunity and in political voice and emphases inequalities between boys and girls in access to schooling or adequate health care are more acute among the poor than among those with higher incomes"*. Poverty is one among many reasons which prevent women from enjoying the benefits of development. In a traditional patriarchal society like ours, the distribution of resources, even in affluent households, is strongly biased against girl children. Often, they are being brought up as inferiors who would readily sacrifice all their ambitions for the sake of their brothers' happiness. Somehow, through their upbringing, they develop the habit of subordination and nurtures it throughout their lives. This willingness on the part of women to play the subordinate role might have prompted Gandhiji to echo the opinion of Tolstoy that *"women are labouring under the 'hypnotic' influence of men"* (Young India, 1932:19). To fast-track our country's development, it is essential to ensure equality between the sexes in all fields, including the political arena. Despite having numerous laws to safeguard women's interests, our women are still considered as subordinates and vulnerable who need constant support from men.

Poverty has a cascading effect on women's lives as it has the potential to affect their social, economic and political capabilities significantly by cutting short women's choices or opportunities. Poverty exacerbates gender inequality and vice versa. It restricts women's capability to enjoy the kind of life they value. (Nevile, 2007). Robert McNamara, the fifth President of the World Bank Group, while defining absolute poverty in his historic speech in 1973 has pointed out that poverty indeed restricts individuals from realizing their full potential. He identified absolute poverty as *"a condition of life so limited as to prevent realization of the potential of the genes with which one is born; a condition of life so degrading as to insult human dignity- and yet a condition of life so common as to be the lot of some 40% of the peoples of the developing countries"* (1973:7).

Knowing the folly of defining the poverty only on the basis of affordability of food alone, Amartya Sen (1999) came up with a more inclusive definition of poverty that gave utmost importance to a person's capability of achieving the kind of life he/she has reasons to value. According to him *"Poverty... is not ultimately a matter of incomes at all; it is one of a failure to achieve certain*

minimum capabilities” (Sen, 1985: 670). Many factors like illiteracy, ill health, lack of financial resources and social connections are found to be responsible for preventing humans from realizing their full potential. Not everyone has the same potential to convert their capabilities into useful ‘beings’ and ‘doings’. As mentioned earlier, based on the opinion of Cagatay (1998), women have many hindrances to convert their resources into useful ‘functionings’, especially in developing countries. From birth to death, a woman has been given a minimal pool of ‘choices’ to expand their capabilities. If we go through the UNDP’s human development reports from 1990 to 2009, the word “choices” features in most of them, and the majority of them define “*human development as a process of enlarging people’s “choices”*” (1997:15, 1990:1) and perceive ‘people’ as change ‘agents’ not as mere beneficiaries. Alkire (2010: 10) in a working paper titled ‘Human Development: Definitions, Critiques and Related Developments’ suggests that “*the description of human development as enlarging people’s choices should be complemented by procedural principles such as equity, efficiency, sustainability, respect for human rights and responsibility*”. The Human Development Report published in 1990 stresses the importance of creating an enabling environment wherein they can live longer and flourish well. From this affirmation, it is clear that everyone deserves such an environment irrespective of their gender, class or ethnicity. However, women and other marginalized groups are often sidelined and stripped of their rightful share in the socio- economic and political benefits of development on account of their inability to contribute significantly towards the growth of the country ‘visibly’. And they are often treated as a ‘burden’ to the system who are in need of constant support in all spheres. Even though their inability arises from their limited set of ‘choices’ to expand their capabilities, society shows little or no concerns towards women’s plights and offers no remedial measures. In the case of working women, maintaining a healthy work-family life balance is, in fact, a challenge as they get little or no time for themselves. After a tiring day’s work at the office, women are supposed to cook, clean and also take care of the elderly and children in the family without pay or recognition. With no time and energy to engage in recreational activities, they often feel stressed out and tired. In her article “Capabilities and Social Justice” (2002) Martha Nussbaum favours capability approach over other approaches based on Gross National Product (GNP), resources, preferences and human rights to assess the quality of life. She points out that unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities and thinks that her version of the “*Capability Approach*” as a rational way to assess the quality of life. Ever since Amartya Sen put forward the concept of measuring

people's well-being based on their ability to achieve the things, they value rather than measuring it based on their income/consumption alone, many scholars have done extensive studies on it. Individual freedom and choices are two essential features of this theory.

Both Nussbaum (2000) and Cagatay (1998) echo this opinion and point out that women are the ones who struggle most to convert their resources into useful '*functionings*'. Nussbaum equals human beings to 'creatures' whose capability can be enhanced by the right educational and material support. She says everyone is born with a set of 'basic capabilities', but without proper nourishment, it is impossible to transform them into high-level capabilities. In this approach individual's freedom to choose from a wide range of choices/options has a unique role in assessing one's quality of life. For example, as Nussbaum points out, there is nothing wrong if a person opts not to get himself/herself involved in play activities when he/she has opportunities to do so. However, if women have to forgo their leisure time, social, political and economic activities due to lack of opportunities and time, it may invoke a feeling of '*unfairness*' in them. Even if they are forced to 'choose' a particular way of life due to their circumstances, they willingly adorn the mask of someone who is the epitome of love, sacrifice and happiness. And they do so as they have no other options. Young girl children married off too early are denied opportunities to get themselves educated, unlike their male counterparts. Through this denial of educational opportunities, they are losing out their chances to be financially independent, socially active and politically enlightened. The author Devika (2010: 269) by clubbing two Malayalam words '*praapti*' (ability) and '*patrata*' (capacity) which has been in use for so long in Kerala, proves that Sen's concept may not be a new idea for Malayalees after all. She says, '*praapti*' (ability) and '*patrata*' (capacity) are interrelated, and lack of *praapti* can erode existing *patrata*. For example, poverty may deny desired ends to those who have capacity since they lack ability. Her idea is somewhat related to Nussbaum's (2000:13) concept of "*internal*" and "*combined*" capabilities and views capability as a combination of capacity, access to resources and ability. The lack of any of these prevents the achievement of desired outcomes. Obviously, the resource crunch faced by Indian women has a substantial role to play in restricting their options for a better life. Women in India very rarely claim their rights in their father's/ brother's/ husband's land property. Traditionally right to land property rests with male members of the family. Right to own property for women is different for different religions and has regional variations also. Typically, in her marital home, a woman has to work for the well-being of her in-laws without ownership rights. Due to the lack of collateral

resources, women often find it very hard to start any business ventures even if she has social and familial approval to do so. However, Sen (1999:201) points out that “*whenever social arrangements depart from the standard practice of male ownership, women can seize business and economic initiative with much success*”. He argues with evidence that, an increase in women’s economic participation has broader social impact than just income generation as it acts as a catalyst for social change by reducing fertility and mortality rates and gender bias in the treatment of women in family decisions. Thus, while denying opportunities to women to get an education, to hold a job outside the home, to actively participate in politics and the likes, we are indirectly resisting favourable social changes. Women, especially from lower socio- economic backgrounds, have a tendency to develop self-esteem issues as their sex role socialization compel them to stick on to the stereotypes of passivity and self-sacrifice. Stromquist (1995:14) prefers to call it as “*learned helplessness*” in which women conform to age-old stereotypes believing it is impossible to modify their environment or personal situations and decide to forgo all the opportunities to improve their situation.

In countries like India, where traditions and culture overpower reasoning and logical thinking of the general public, women tend to naturalize their subordinate status and act as if they are okay with less autonomy. Therefore, they may not consider the inequality encountered by them in their daily lives as ‘unjust’. For some, going ‘choiceless’ is nothing but conforming to the existing laws and traditions ignoring all possibilities of challenging age-old practices and thus they undermine their own well-being as well as that of their female family members’. People used to make their choices based on their personal experiences in accordance with their social existence. Stromquist (1995) highlights the manifestations of women’s secondary status in the society as; lower political representation, a greater presence in the unorganized sector of the economy with lower financial benefits, the nearly full responsibility of family and children, narrow career aspirations and low self-esteem and sometimes physical torturing and unwanted pregnancies. Obviously, women’s tendency to naturalize their subordinate position is so deep- rooted in our social system and has been noted by many social scientists. In Lazao’s words, (1995:27) “*it is nothing but ‘blissful ignorance’ which compels many women to idealise their oppressors and live in utter powerlessness with no sense of control over their environment*”. Citing Bourdieu’s (1977) concept “doxa” which refers “*to traditions and beliefs which exist beyond discourse or argumentation*”, Kabeer (1999a: 441) points out the importance of transition “*from doxa to discourse, a more critical*

consciousness” that discourages people from embracing the social order as such without questioning; instead, it encourages them to develop a critical perspective on it. Such a transition help people to know about the existence of more alternatives/choices. And it is crucial to assess whether they could transform them into worthwhile accomplishments by checking the merits of other choices and feasibility of achieving a better outcome using them. Stromquist (1995) also puts forward a similar concept. According to her, one of the four components of empowerment, cognitive - refers to women’s ability to understand the implications of their subordination and its root causes. Hall (1992) says, “*empowerment also involves understanding the self and the need to make choices which are against the existing cultural and social norms, and a clear understanding of habits that create dependence, interdependence and autonomy within the family and in the society at large*” (Cited by Stromquist 1995:14). Therefore, we can say that the first step towards empowerment is generating a critical consciousness/insight/ awareness about one’s own present situation. Empowerment enables the person to develop a clearer perception of her present situation so that she could perceive a better situation, and work towards achieving it by utilizing what is within her reach (Lazo, 1995).

As pointed out in UNDP reports, Kabeer (1999a: 437) also insists on the importance of having multiple choices or alternatives in one’s life to expand knowledge, live healthily and acquire wealth and views it as a way to improve one’s quality of life. She even equates power with one’s ability to make choices. For her, “*empowerment is a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability*”. From this definition, it is understood that only those who experienced disempowerment or lack of choices are entitled to be empowered. While explaining characteristics of empowerment Lazo (1995:25) says, “*empowerment provides women with a bundle of new options, and as a result, they acquire leverage and bargaining power. Thus, they gain relative strength and power, also reduction in both invisibility and vulnerability*”.

Based on its significance on an individual’s life, Kabeer (1999a: 437) categorizes ‘choices’ into two groups; “*first-order- strategic life choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want- and second-order choices*”- which are formed with the help of strategic life choices and are less consequential; however these are important for one’s quality of life though not constitute its defining parameters. Hence her definition of empowerment refers to “*the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them*”.

According to her empowerment can be conceptualized in terms of three interrelated terms 1. Resources/preconditions 2. Agency/process 3. Achievements/ outcomes. The first dimension of power, *“resources include all sorts of material, social and human resources, all of which improve one’s ability to exercise his/her choice”*. The literal meaning of the second dimension of power, ‘agency’ is ‘one’s ability to make decisions’ and execute them confidently. Earlier, most of the welfare programmes considered women as passive recipients of welfare benefits from the State and never identified them as a group who can effect a potential change in the society. However, there has been a shift from this ‘welfarist’ approach to a much broader *“women’s agency”* approach which recognizes women as active agents of social transformation (Sen 1999:189). Marion Bernadette G Cabrera (2007:51-52) defines it as *“women’s experiences of making the most of their situation, in the following ways: her ability to rise above the situations she is pressed with; participation in the community; assertion of identity; and how she continues to survive and make changes for herself and her immediate environment and community”*. In simple terms, it is the ability of a woman to act for herself and its impact could be visible in her own life as well as in the society surrounds her. The best way to project the impact of women’s empowerment and the improved agency is highlighting reduced fertility rates and infant mortality rates in those areas where women enjoy a better social status and economic freedom. Many development scientists across the globe, including Amartya Sen, have associated Kerala’s higher socio-economic indicators with improved women’s education and agency. When we talk about agency, it should be noted that agency can be expressed in both positive and negative sense in relation to ‘power’ as explained by Kabeer (1999a:438). Its positive expression *“power to”* refers to someone’s ability to describe his/her own ‘choices’ in life and to chase them no matter what, overcoming opposition from others. Its negative expression *“power over”* is nothing but, someone’s ability to dominate others through the excessive use of ferocity, compulsion and intimidating remarks. Agency can be exercised either individually or collectively. Kudumbashree and other such initiatives encourage women to pool in all their resources for the betterment of their lives, aiming collective capability expansion targeting their empowerment. When in collectivities, poor women find it easier to exercise their agency more effectively.

The third dimension of power is ‘achievement’, which is similar to Sen’s (1985) idea of ‘functionings’. Kabeer (1999a: 438), views the failure to achieve one’s goals as a manifestation of disempowerment as it reflects some deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose. The first two

dimensions of power resources and agency together constitute capabilities. Based on Sen's idea of Capability Approach (CA), Ibrahim introduces a new term called '*collective capabilities*' which he defines as "*the newly generated functioning bundles a person obtains by virtue of his/her engagement in a collectivity that help her/him achieve the life he/she has reasons to value*" (2006:397). In developing countries, people's collectivities or self-help initiatives have a unique role in bringing out favourable social changes in a sustainable manner. For poor, limited access to resources, both material and social prevents them from individually realizing their capabilities. However, if they try for the same in a group setting by pooling in all their resources, the realization becomes effective as well as more sustainable. The idea of participatory development which has gained momentum in the early 1990s calls for the inclusion of all women, the old, young, disabled and those belonged to lower castes as well as minorities in the development process. This movement recognizes the people's unique responsibility in contributing to their own upliftment rather than remain as passive spectators. Participatory development refers to community involvement in identifying their 'own' problems by taking up the responsibility to assess their needs, prioritise them, mobilise necessary resources and thus to find out innovative ways to tackle them using local self- governments as monitoring agencies (Nawaz, 2013). The idea of the formation of self-help groups that allows poor and marginalized to exercise their agency to foster favourable social changes has been projected as an integral part of participatory development. Since women are more vulnerable to poverty, establishing women-centred self-help groups based on microcredit can reduce poverty as well. And such "*programmes are mainly related to the creation of opportunity for their social security and empowerment; physical, social, economic and political*" (John, 2009:11). Stromquist projects that formation of small-scale voluntary association of women is a sure way to improve their leadership skills, self-esteem, competency and autonomy irrespective of the objectives of the groups. She thinks that "*stepping outside of the home and participating in some form of collective undertaking that can be successful, is essential to develop a sense of independence and competence among women and also suggests that creation of a small, cohesive group, with which its members may identify closely enhances empowerment*" (1995:16). Lazo's (1995:35) opinion is also not much different from Stromquist's. She says "collectivization maximises empowerment as strengths could be put together and the individual weaknesses plugged via the group or collective". Therefore, we can say that 'collectivization' of women leads to their empowerment and it is an essential prerequisite. According to Sahu and Singh (2012: 474)

“self- help groups are a very small voluntary association of poor and marginalized preferably from the same socio-economic backgrounds which have actually become the ‘vehicle of change’ for them to be released from the clutches of poverty”.

The movement that first started in Bangladesh under the leadership of Muhammad Yunus through his Grameen Bank, was praised as a practical way of addressing women’s poverty. Quoting the views of Nobel laureate Yunus, De Sudipta and Debnarayan (2011) state that women constitute the majority of the under-employed, the poor, the economically and socially disadvantaged. Moreover, they experience hunger and poverty in much more ways than men and are not seen as creditworthy by most of the financial institutions. Yunus finds that the credit given to women brought about changes faster than when given to men. The movement viewed women as creditworthy and disbursed loan among them to start business ventures. Many studies suggest the repayment rate would be high if the borrower is a female. In India, though the first organized attempt was made in as early as 1954 in Gujarat, the system had not shaped up well till Ela Bhatt started Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in 1972. However, in later years, the microcredit revolution was more or less confined to the four southern states where government and non-governmental organizations took a bit more effort to spread the advantages of microcredit activities as observed by Rajendran (2012).

Self-help groups effectively provide women with a platform to gather periodically, where they can engage in conversations with their companions on different topics. Through different activities and programmes designed in accordance with rural women’s needs, *“they discover themselves- their strengths, weaknesses and possibilities”* (Shihabudheen, 2013:12). Stromquist (1995) equates the foundation of learning that happens in women’s groups to collective learning as in Bandura’s social learning theory (1977). Since the learning process happening within the self-help group is very close to the participants’ everyday realities, and experiences, the effect of such learnings is expected to last longer. Practically, in a group setting members are expected to complement each other’s weaknesses through awareness generation, conscientization, education and training. As mentioned earlier, *“the empowerment starts with women’s recognition of themselves- their personal capabilities, including their self-image. To be empowered, women must learn to respect themselves and regard themselves as capable”* (Lazao 1995:35). Dighe (1995:39) also agrees that self-confidence and self-worth are two of the most important characteristics of an empowered

woman. According to Dighe, *“an empowered person would be the one who critically analyses his/her social and political environment and also capable of exercising control over decisions that affects his/her life”*. When we talk about self-help group’s ability to create empowerment among poor women, it is essential to check whether this movement provides ample opportunities to its participant’s cognitive, psychological and economic well-being. To find out this, let us examine the results of a few studies. In her paper *“Gender and Poverty”*, Cagatay (1998) uses the results of a study, *“South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP): The Case of Indian Social mobilization of Self-help groups”* to show that self-help groups can leave a positive impact on poverty among women as it reduces rural poverty significantly. As per the study, women exhibited extraordinary managerial and leadership skills, started income generation activities, attained higher status in the community and stated their opinions on economic issues. Moreover, they have started gaining respect from their marital family as they brought concrete benefits to the entire family. Another study titled *“Role of Self-Help Group on Women Empowerment with Special Reference to Dindigul District-Tamil Nadu”* by Thileepan and Soundararajan (2014), also reports similar outcome, i.e., women are participating in all productive activities and are on par with men, besides SHG members’ savings are increased to a desirable extent which automatically increases the purchasing power and increases the standard of living thereby enhance the empowerment of women. However, De Sudipta and Sarker, Debbarayan’s (2011) study points out that mere access to financial resources is not the sole determinant of empowerment, but their ability to exercise ‘control’ on available financial resources determines the extent of empowerment. Besides, it suggests that the average empowerment level of women participating in microcredit activities for eight years or more is higher than the non- participating women, and they spend more on their family’s food intake. The study by Tasqurun Nessa (2012) suggests that when women control decisions regarding credit and savings, they not only optimize their own but their household’s welfare also.

When it comes to the women’s decision-making abilities, their authority to take decisions has always been under scrutiny. Yogendrarajah’s study (2013), ‘Women Empowerment through Decision Making’ gives us a vivid account of how social norms and traditions restrict women from making decisions confidently. The author questions the merit of an unwritten social norm in Sri Lanka, which accepts male-headed households only. He points out that in some cases; the husband is the sole decision-maker even if the wife is the sole breadwinner. When Sri Lankan war left many

families virtually “headless”, the women had to fill in the vacant head position. However, they still find it challenging to take decisions regarding savings, purchasing assets, investments and other economic, social and political activities. They had to consult with other older male members in the family while taking important decisions. The author concludes the study with a few suggestions to enhance women’s autonomy like gender workshops, training programmes as well as establishing and maintaining SHG based on microcredit. The study by Sahu and Singh (2012) with the primary objective of assessing the role of SHGs in the empowerment of women in rural Pondicherry, has also found remarkable improvements in parameters like freedom of mobility, ability to make purchases, household decisions, political awareness, economic security, freedom from domination and the like. The improved access to credit facilities enhanced both decision making and purchasing abilities of the women involved.

Self-help group initiatives like Kudumbashree, which is a Kerala government’s flagship programme designed to alleviate rural poverty, provides ample opportunities to poor women to venture out of their homes to start a new life altogether. A study by Williams et al., (2011) *“Participatory Citizenship- Politics and Power in Kerala’s Kudumbashree Programme”* equates Kudumbashree to a government-sponsored engineered space envisaged to encourage women’s active participation in the process of social development. The three primary roles of the Kudumbashree mission can be summarised as 1) credit and thrift activities 2) micro-enterprises for financial empowerment 3) an active role in participatory planning of local self-government institutions. Obviously, the increased social visibility of the women in public space as a result of their group involvement leads to enhanced social relations as well. The group meetings, visits to banks or local panchayat meetings and the likes are proved to be beneficial for developing comradeship among women. In the above-mentioned study, the authors insist that Kudumbashree has the potential to remould civil society by direct interventions like expanding their social networks, securing livelihoods and enhancing their social standing but within the existing local gender norms. The proof can be seen in a number of other studies done throughout the length and breadth of Kerala as well. One of such studies titled *“A Study on Kudumbashree Project; A poverty Eradication Programme in Kerala- Performance, Impact, and Lessons for other States”* by John (2009), critically evaluate the performance of Kudumbashree Programme to find out measures to address some of its drawbacks to strengthen them in Kerala and to repeat in other states. The study proved beyond doubt that capacity, morale and confidence of Kudumbashree members had

increased substantially. Moreover, they acquired skills, knowledge and leadership qualities in addition to entrepreneurial skills. They have developed an understanding of banking operations also. By analyzing Kudumbashree members' income over the years, he claims that there is a significant improvement in their financial status too. The exposure to various banking operations enabled them to be better managers of their financial resources. This study highlights Kudumbashree member's active presence in social issues like various public health awareness campaigns, health surveys and camps, campaigns for promoting cloth bags, distribution of essentials, and the like. Like any other Social development programme, Kudumbashree also is not free from drawbacks. This study identifies a few deficiencies like political misuse, ego clashes between CBOs and Panchayat, work overload of CBO volunteers, cross borrowings, the establishment of parallel SHG groups by NGOs and religious organizations, unsustainable micro-enterprises and the likes. The uniqueness of the Kudumbashree programme rests with the fact that its close association with PRI's. The author visualizes it as a 'symbiotic' relationship in which both parties draw benefits from. Local self-government provides infrastructural and organizational expertise to Kudumbashree. The close association between the two ensures its sustainability as well. Based on the success of the Kudumbashree mission in Kerala, the author suggests the linkage of women SHGs with local government in other states also. To improve the performance of Kudumbashree units, the author suggests a wide range of measures like issuing strict protocols to provide self-sufficiency and functional freedom to CDS, promoting a healthy relationship between CDS and panchayat, reducing unhealthy competition between Kudumbashree SHGs and Non-Kudumbashree SHGs by letting them register with local government institutions, de-politicising of SHGs, inculcating innovative marketing skills and the like.

In another study done by Shihabudheen, in 2013 "What is right and wrong with Kudumbashree: the field experiences", he discusses both positives and negatives of Kudumbashree. The author appreciates the way Kudumbashree approaches poverty in a holistic way to make the "powerless" their own masters, who are capable of making their own "choices". The women, once confined to the limited circle of their household, have plenty of options now to get themselves educated, to start business ventures, to be actively involved in social work and the likes. Therefore, the Kudumbashree mission could be seen as a capability enhancement programme as it enhances both capacities (inborn) as well as their ability to convert them into useful functionings. However, this author also lists out a few drawbacks in its implementation like ego clashes among different

“power centres”, increased politicization, exclusion of “excluded” groups, overloading of administrative tasks, deliberate delays/non-release/diversion of funds earmarked for Kudumbashree activities, lack of integration among members, cross borrowing and high-interest rates.

While assessing the success of Kudumbashree initiative through a feminist lens Thampi and Devika (2007) find, that it encouraged people to see a woman as someone who brings in monetary benefits to the family instead of viewing them as someone who takes up unpaid family labour. Though they acknowledge Kudumbashree’s contributions towards improving its members’ confidence and social skills, the authors failed to find any elements that arrest the furtherance of patriarchy by directly questioning it. As a matter of fact, Malayalees accept Kudumbashree, as long as it enhances the financial betterment of the family without disturbing existing gender norms much. In fact, for Kerala’s patriarchal society, women empowerment is equivalent to, women’s increased “*capacity to improv the well-being of their families*” (Thampi and Devika 2007:36), through group involvement or community participation.

Malayalee women themselves view Kudumbashree membership as an opportunity to supplement their family income by engaging in small scale business ventures that do not disrupt their family balance. And many of those belonging to the poorest of poor category use this opportunity to climb up the social ladder using their position of group leader or CDS/ADS member. Kudumbashree’s linkage to the Panchayats and the availability of opportunities for saving and credit throughout the year have made the initiative popular among the poorest. Thampi and Devika (2007:42) further feel that absolute freedom from patriarchy can be materialized with strategies “*that directly seek to empower women against both the material and the cultural ideological constraints that the family, the community and public institutions impose on them, along with measures to build their economic capabilities and social capital*”. They conclude the article by pointing out three areas of examination to know the extent of empowerment achieved by the participants of Kudumbashree within a feminist political agenda. Firstly, the importance of money income and how it increases their ability to bargain with patriarchy. Secondly, how do women leaders handle the ‘power’ especially in local self- government? Thirdly, the authors point out the importance of observing the extent to which women’s empowerment translate into political action that enables them to challenge patriarchal power and overcome it permanently.

Initiatives like Kudumbashree can also be seen as “schools of democracy” that offers participants an opportunity to learn and practice different political processes through participatory methods. As Fung and Wright (2003) note, such initiatives expand participant’s political capacities through (re)formulating their political interests. Moreover, it has the potential to change the way women express their political agency (Williams et al., 2011). Its potential to ‘create’ women leaders has been noted by many other scholars also. Sometimes, women’s entry into leadership positions can be forced or reluctant. Either way, their exposure to leadership changes the way women express their political agency. Therefore, a reasonable period at the top of the Kudumbashree administration could be a ‘game-changer’ in the long run.

2.2.1 Women and Political representation: A Reality Check

Many international conventions and declarations have indicated that for a better tomorrow women’s wholehearted participation in all spheres of life is needed, especially in the political sphere where their presence is negligible. The very first one was the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It recognized the importance of addressing inequality in political decision-making bodies. Beijing Declaration in 1995, also declared women’s empowerment and their full participation in the process of decision making and access to power are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. Later in the year 2000, in the United Nation’s Millennium Summit “gender equality and women empowerment” has been declared as the third goal among eight time-bound targets known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The preamble of the IPU’s Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments recognizes “*gender equality and women empowerment as human rights, requiring political and legal expression*” and it further states that “*gender equality means that women and men enjoy full and equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.*” (2017:5).

Two decades have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) has acknowledged the importance of empowering women politically as a means of achieving equality, development and peace. Still, we have not made any significant improvements in ensuring women’s equal participation in all spheres, including political representation as visualized in the Beijing Declaration. In the modern world, irrespective of the opportunities, to get educated and to work, only a few women make it to the top, especially to political leadership. As per UNWOMEN,

we have just 24.3% of women parliamentarians around the world as of February 2019, which exhibits a minor increase from 1995's 11.3%. As of June 2019, we have 11 women as Head of State and 12 as Head of Government. Though women constitute 50 % of the world's population, their presence in political leadership is way less than desirable. Over the centuries, women too became habituated to the phenomena of being ruled by elite male leaders.

Though born equals, unlike men, women had to fight for their enfranchisement. In a study done with the major objective of revealing the past as well as the present political status of women author Chadha (2014) says, until the publication of Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792) no woman in the world ever dreamt of exercising their "voting" rights. American women during the early 19th century started their fight with the system for voting rights. At the beginning of the 20th century, women got right to vote in the countries like New Zealand, Australia, Finland and Norway. In European nations, the efforts for enfranchising women have gained momentum during the period of World War 1 and its aftermath. After getting rights to vote in local/municipal elections, gradually they sealed their victory in the case of national enfranchisement as well. Countries like Italy and China let their women vote immediately after the Second World War. However, some conservative Arab countries are still averse of the idea of women having equal rights.

Indian women's fight for the right for political participation began as early as the 20th century when they identified active political involvement as a sure way to speed up social reforms. Many social reformers insisted on the importance of education and making people sensitive to the injustice done to women, thus making society free from social evils. Social reform movements became successful in educating women, banning child marriages and promoting remarriages. During the freedom movement, many women leaders were seen fighting with their tooth and nail alongside with Gandhiji and other leaders against the British Raj. The Swadeshi Movement brought in more women into the independence movement. Mahatma Gandhi has made serious efforts to arouse political consciousness in the poor, illiterate women to ensure their active presence in the freedom movement from 1917. For Gandhiji, the freedom struggle was not about political freedom alone, but also about economic and social reforms. Gradually with the attainment of independence, women's presence in the public space has deteriorated. As Chadha (2014)

observes, the majority of those who remained in politics actively were from wealthy and progressive families with strong family support.

In India, the percentage of women as voters equals with men, but their political participation as decision-makers or policy formulators remains very low. Gender equality is not just equality under law or equality of opportunity but also about equality of voice (Engendering Development, 2001:5) means *“the ability to influence and contribute to the development process”*. While Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU- 2012) recommends a minimum of 30% threshold for women parliamentarians to have an impact on decision making, India had just 12.6% of women in Lok Sabha as of first February 2019. As per the data collected by IPU as of February 1st 2019 with the input from National Parliaments, India ranked 149 out of 193 countries in the case of the percentage of women in the lower or single House. The position of our neighbouring countries like Nepal (36), Pakistan (100) and Bangladesh (95) are found to be better than ours. The story is not much different in the case of state governments also, implying that the voice of Indian women remains more or less unheard.

As we discussed in the first part of this chapter women have many hindrances on their way to top leadership positions including poverty, lack of time and other resources, familial support, caring and other family responsibilities and the like. Moreover, women's authority is surpassed by men in almost all levels from household to the top policy-making levels. Regarding the reason for their meagre presence in politics, scholars like Kapoor and Ravi (2013) adopt Amartya Sen's (1990, 1992) theory of 'missing women'. According to this theory, the worsening sex-ratio has a direct impact on electorate sex ratio. The authors also draw from the theoretical model developed by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) which builds on the framework developed by Osborne and Slivinski (1996), Coate and Besley (1997) known as 'Citizen Candidate Model' to conclude, i.e., *“when the cost of contesting elections is relatively higher for women, they will not contest in places where they are well represented, while in constituencies where the gender ratio is worse, female candidates contest elections, but are less likely to win”* (Kapoor and Ravi 2013:3). The two predictions together imply that there will be lower female representation in parliament. Anuradha Chadha's study in 2014 notes structural barriers and capacity gaps are two significant reasons that keep women away from politics in addition to the reasons like traditional division of labour,

financial constraints the type of electoral system, inadequate training, violence against women and increased cost for election campaigning.

The advantages of having a considerable number of women in the administration have been pointed out by many social scientists. For example, the study by Fisman, Gatti et al., (2001) finds, corruption decreases when women's number increases in parliaments. They believe that women's presence effectively makes the government honest and reduces its lack of empathy towards socially sensitive issues. To clarify this, they quote political scientist Tishkov's (1993) opinion, *"women bring enriching values [to government]"*. As a result, they *"rarely succumb to authoritarian styles of behaviour and prefer not to maintain the sort of expensive entourage which often accompanies high placed (male) officials. Finally, the presence of women in the higher echelons of the hierarchical structures exercises an extremely positive influence on the behaviour of their male colleagues by restraining, disciplining and elevating the latter's' behaviour"* (Fisman, Gatti et al., 2001: 423-24). The same has been conveyed in the World Bank Report *"Engendering Development"* (2001) also. The report associates greater women's right and equal participation in public life with cleaner business and government and better governance. Both reports pinpoint women's higher standard of ethical behaviour, and their natural aversion to taking risks are the reasons for the reduction in corruption. When it comes to the legislative decisions concerned with women and children, women political leaders often exhibit better sensitivity and responsiveness than their male counterparts. (Fisman, Gatti et al., 2001 and Jones, 1998). Moreover, the presence of women legislators enhances the legitimacy of the political system in which they serve (Jones, 1998).

However, women leaders often find it very hard to make an impact as they do not present in significant numbers in most of the legislatures. Many experts have suggested the introduction of electoral quotas for women as a solution. It is instrumental in addressing the under- representation of women as it ensures the presence of a minimum number of women in all legislatures. An Inter-Parliamentary Union study (Women in Parliament, 2012) finds, in countries where electoral quotas were used women made their presence felt by occupying seats as high as 24% whereas, in countries where no electoral quotas were used, they managed only 12% of seats.

In countries, where women's political entry is treated with suspicion and apprehension introduction of 'quota' provides them with a much needed 'jump' start. A quota is nothing but

setting aside a few seats for women and other oppressed groups to enhance their political participation. Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2003), mentions four major arguments of scholars who demand equal political participation of women as follows;

1. The justice argument in which women claim equal participation rights on account of their 50% share in world population.
2. The experience argument in which women argue, due to their difference in social and biological construction with men, their presence in the legislature will bring in the much-needed human touch to the politics.
3. The interest group argument that emphasis, men cannot represent women's needs as they both have conflicting interests generally.
4. Women leaders can serve as role models for aspiring younger lots.

Electoral quotas can be introduced either by legally or by voluntary party quota. The legal quotas introduced through a constitutional amendment or changing the electoral law are found to be more effective than voluntary party quotas as the latter has no legal status. As Mc Cann, (2013:8) says, *“the success of candidate quotas depends in part on having the right kind of quota law and implementing it under the right conditions”*. Twenty-four of the top 50 IPU ranked countries, mostly developed European, follow voluntary party quotas as they allow the parties to express their gender sensitivity more strategically and thus to attract more female voters. Political parties in liberal democracies like New Zealand and Australia, are of the view that initiatives like “soft quotas” will eventually bring, gender parity without many rules. Generally, legal gender quotas are recommended for developing countries where women are traditionally denied political opportunities (Li- Ju Chen, 2010).

The detractors of the quota system argue that the practice is biased, and it stripes men of their opportunities to become political leaders. However, the quota system has been accepted worldwide as a compensatory measure to the earlier injustice done to the women. The recent literature on quota suggests a shift of views from the concept of “equal opportunities” to “equality of results” (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003). Unlike the “equal opportunity” concept, which identifies only formal barriers that prevent women from active political participation, the “equality of results” concept identifies hidden barriers and adopts compensatory measures to overcome any structural barriers faced by women. Therefore, the quota system should be seen as a progressive measure to

ensure equality of results by removing deep rooted structural barriers in society not as a source of discrimination against men. Quota system lets women penetrate into the male-dominated traditional political leadership pattern easily. It does not allow political parties to ease their way out by simply saying there are not enough competent women; instead, it demands women's presence in all levels of party administration. However, the quota system has some demerits as well. It does nothing to reduce women leaders' double burden and the gender imbalance of financial means for campaigning. Disagreeing with the view of scholars like Karvonen and Selle (1995) who treat women's minimal presence as a question of "time lag", expecting this issue will resolve on its own when women improve their general integration in the society, Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2003) say gender inequality could be (re)produced even in modern settings also. Irrespective of a few demerits mentioned above, many countries have adopted the quota system as a measure to enhance women's political participation. As article 4 of CEDAW suggests, there is no need to make such measures permanent and can be discontinued once they gain sufficient foothold in politics. Though, the quota system has the capacity to 'fast track' women's political representation, for better results, laws associated with it should be ambitious and carry sanctions for non-compliance, such as refusal to register a party (IPU 2012). Political parties as "gatekeepers" select and prepare candidates for election. They are responsible for moulding future leaders by introducing them to the process of governance. The parties' unique culture and rules determine its attitude towards gender equality. While progressive liberal parties usually express their solidarity with women equality seekers, traditional male-centric parties, often reject positive affirmation measures like women quotas. Placing women in winnable positions is also an important factor that determines its success. Political parties, generally have a tendency to leave non-winnable seats to women. Therefore, imposing legal sanction on political parties has been followed by certain countries (McCann, 2013). Parties' refusal to recruit women to higher administrative positions within the party also has been noted by many scholars like McCann. Quoting Zetterberg's study, he notes that *"the harshest battles are fought within political parties, for positions of power... Without strict and transparent rules on how to select women candidates, quota legislation provides no solution to the fairly undemocratic practices of candidate selection"* (2008: 455).

As a temporary measure, the quota system seems to be a reliable measure to facilitate women's entry into the political sphere. Long term strategies like education, consciousness building aimed

to bring in cultural and attitude change are also needed. Adopting long term strategies alone will not bring expected results within a year or two even in an egalitarian society where women enjoy better freedom, but it may take one or two generations to reflect any changes in the system. The responsibility to facilitate competent women leaders' entry into the public sphere, lies not only with the government but also with non-governmental organisations, political parties, trade unions and religious establishments. As parliamentary system around the world has been developed and nurtured by men, it shows no concern for women's special needs as mothers and family caretakers. Therefore, the Inter-Parliamentary Union comes up with an action plan for creating gender-sensitive parliaments all around the world. According to which (IPU, 2017:5), *"a gender-sensitive parliament is a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods, and work."* And such parliaments try their best to remove all the obstacles that prevent women from political participation and remain as role models to society. Besides, they promote gender equality by making sure that all the available resources are used towards this goal. *"A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers-substantive, structural or cultural- to women's full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff"* (Mc Cann, 2013:11-12). The report also recommends special actions to raise women parliamentarians like establishing constitutional electoral quotas that provide for reserved seats, preventing and punishing violence against women parliamentarians and candidates, facilitating a healthy work-family balance and the like.

In India, women's entry into the local government touched a new high when the Panchayati Raj Act became effective in April 24th 1993 as a result of the 73rd amendment to the constitution in 1992. This was aimed to address the 'historical inequality' meted out at women for generations. Consequently, women's presence in the local level politics has been increased up to a decent 33% which is a visible change. While special measures like women quotas keep women's underrepresentation under check, such measures do nothing to enhance the 'quality' of their participation. Kaushal (2010:90) says the quantitative increase may not translate into real empowerment as *"many of these women act as a proxy to their menfolk and identifies other handicaps like illiteracy, poverty, lack of resources, socio-cultural factors like patriarchy and caste system under the feudal and patriarchal Indian social setup, lack of political experience and the growing negative role of the political parties and the ever-increasing role of money and muscle power in grassroots politics."* The author then quotes the results of some studies to show that

women have performed dismally in some panchayats, highlighting instances where female ‘Pradhanapatis’ have ended up as mere ‘rubber stamps’ who were unpassionate, incompetent and uninformed. However, the author highlights some case studies from her field experience to show that there are women panchayat presidents who have become role models for the younger generation. The author views the success of reservation policy as ‘mixed’, pointing out its inability to bring in changes overnight as the majority of those women are new entrants who experience various limitations because of age-old practices. Generally, the majority of the scholars are under the impression that women are capable of providing leadership to the people if they are given time, support, resources, training and freedom from men. Therefore, special attention should be given to enhance women politician’s ability to handle power relations also. To attain gender equality in its true sense, women need to elevate themselves to positions which control power relations inside the organizations as Nawas (2013) suggests. Many studies done in the area of women’s empowerment through self-help group suggest that it as an effective way to tackle problems associated with women’s sudden and unprepared entry into politics. For example, the study by Sahu and Singh (2012) finds that women’s participation in groups has significantly increased their knowledge of political parties, processes, and their political and legal rights. Kudumbashree members’ active presence in the Panchayat election has been presented as one of the significant achievements in a study by John (2009). In another study by Kandpal et al., (2013) for World Bank reveals that participation in a community-level female development programme significantly increases access to employment, physical mobility and political participation. The study of Linderg (2011) et al., also acknowledges reservation system’s ability to bring in significant social changes though it confirms the existence of “*proxy*” syndrome (panchayat affairs were managed by husbands of women presidents in most cases) in the studied villages. However, some studies rubbish the “*macro-myth*”- the perception that women leaders at the local level may end up as ‘proxies’, completely controlled by family members and local politicians, at least in Kerala like Devika and Thampy’s study in 2012. They believe values such as “*gentle power*” and “*knowledge of rule*” of women leaders’ in Kerala might have helped them to deliver their leadership responsibilities effectively. While appreciating Kudumbashree’s efforts in making more confident and independent women Devika and Thampi (2007) question its inability to dismantle patriarchy. Even in Kerala, where women are better educated, healthier and less fertile, they are conspicuously absent from the public sphere. The patriarchy encourages women to remain in their ‘ideal’ selves

without disturbing the existing gender balance. The period after the 1990s saw a significant improvement in women's social visibility due to factors like increased media vigilantism, reservation laws and evolution of SHG due to which their presence in local governing bodies has been increased. However, this did not cause a significant improvement in the number of women leaders who take up state and national level politics. Therefore, it is high time to think about implementing women reservation in legislative assemblies to increase their numerical strength as a compensatory measure for the "historical inequality".

2.3 Research gap

Based on the reviewed literature, the following conclusions are drawn. First of all, irrespective of efforts of various organisations and forums, women are nowhere near to achieving the perfect equilibrium in the political sphere. As Nussbaum (2000:2) says, "*women are not treated as ends in their own right, persons with a dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions. Instead, they are treated as mere instruments of the ends of others- reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, agents of a family's general prosperity*". Secondly, out of all marginalized groups, women are the ones who face severe resource crunch and are affected by poverty the most. The case will be worse for a woman who belongs to Dalit or Adivasi communities. Thirdly, women are conspicuously absent from the political arena. Their absence in political decision-making bodies is believed to be one of the major causes of their vulnerability by many researchers (Chadha 2014, Kapoor and Ravi 2013). Moreover, the lack of enough women representatives in the governing system may result in a lack of empathetic views towards women's issues while formulating policies and programmes. When we talk about equality, it does not mean that the administrative structure of every organization should be filled with an equal number of men and women; instead, it implies that irrespective of the numbers present, they should be able to handle the power relations within the organization (Nawas 2013). Fourthly, the idea of political reservation for women has emerged as a way to enhance women's presence in politics. Enactment of Panchyati Raj Act in 1992 accelerated women's presence in grassroots level politics though it did nothing much to the women's political entry in higher level (Reshma and Gowda, 2012). Fifthly, the term 'empowerment' has been evolved as a 'magical' solution to all the problems faced by women, and political empowerment is seen as a major component in addition to economic and social empowerment. The existing literature in this area suggests self-help groups can be used as a tool

for empowering women economically, socially and politically and acknowledges the importance of SHGs in inculcating leadership skills and political awareness among women (Cagatay 1998, John 2009, Thileepan and Soundararajan 2014, Sudipta and Debnarayan 2011, Rathirane 2013, Rajendran 2012, Sahu and Singh 2012). SHG exposure of the women leaders has indeed helped them to exercise their political agency better, and it has been noted that the 'proxy' effect is under check now (Kandpal et al., 2013) contradicting the views of Kaushal (2010) and Linderg et al., (2011). However, the majority of the critics have agreed that SHG trained women leaders to have the capacity and poise to enter into national-level politics if they are given time, support, fund, training and autonomy from men. Authors like Devika and Thampi (2012) while acknowledging SHG's potential to improve women's 'visibility' in the public sphere, they express their doubt in its ability to question 'patriarchy' in a way feminist would really like to. They see, it as an adjustment to improve women's overall welfare to a certain extent by providing opportunities for saving and credit but without damaging the existing gender norms much (Devika and Thampi, 2007). Devika (2010) defines capability as a combination of capacity, access to resources and ability and suggests the concept of capability approach has been used in Kerala's social development circle since the 19th century. In those days, people used education as a means to expand their 'life options' by acquiring new capabilities like reading and writing. Women in Kerala often fail to convert their existing capabilities into useful functioning and are forced to live with the limited life options as they prefer not to upset the balance of the family. They usually stick on to 'feminized jobs' so that they can still be the cook, cleaner, caretaker and the likes in their families. Therefore, the detractors of the SHG movement often maintain that Kudumbashree like initiatives are designed only for re-emphasizing the role of already existing gender norms as it failed to address women's wider gender needs. At the same time, its role in improving quality of lives of poor women by improving their access to resources, optimizing the use of available resources and promoting sustainable development is widely appreciated by welfare scientists around the world.

Apart from this, initiatives like Kudumbashree often serve as 'schools of democracy' that offers participants an opportunity to learn and practice different political processes through participatory methods. Another study co-authored by Kawrla and Thampi (2012), emphasizes the importance of building an "invented" space within which women's political subjectives may be realized along with the 'invited' space allocated by the government for inclusion of women in local self-

governments through various platforms like ICT enabled online discussion platforms. The study conducted by John (2009) found that many women assumed leadership qualities through Kudumbashree activities and got elected to Panchayats or Municipalities. As a result of the Panchayati Raj Act women all over India, found themselves on top of local self-government institutions without much previous experience or the knowledge of rules. Slowly but steadily, they have picked up bits and pieces of politics and proved their detractors wrong. Many studies have pointed out the role of self-help groups, especially Kudumbashree's, in making this integration smoother and faster. In fact, SHGs like Kudumbashree act as 'political learning centres' as it provides them with opportunities to learn and practice different political processes. Its tie-up with local self-government is an additional advantage. Since their induction into the Kudumbashree, the members get to work very closely with the PRIs which will improve their knowledge of rules and the way it functions. Once they get familiarized with the system, they effortlessly make autonomous decisions without being mere proxies. Kudumbashree members receive various kinds of capacity building programmes which may open up a plethora of opportunities for them to develop leadership qualities. Eventually, they will become experts in communication as well as conflict management. In the study conducted by Kawlra and Thampi (2010-12), it has been noted that 25% of their respondents have been involved in Kudumbashree activities and another 20% of them have acknowledged the role of Kudumbashree and other such organisations in getting them elected. In short, it can be assumed that those women leaders who enter into politics via Kudumbashree are capable of discharging their functions more confidently and also exercise their agency better.

Though many studies have been done already to assess the level of empowerment of women SHG members generally, the researcher could not find any study focused exclusively on how Kudumbashree inspires women to be active politicians in the grassroots level. The present study entitled "Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in Politically Empowering Women in Kottayam District of Kerala" showcases women's journey from silence to articulation, from ordinary SHG members to leaders in PRIs by enhancing their capabilities through SHG activities. Moreover, knowing the extent of women's political empowerment as a result of their active involvement with SHGs is a boost for the supporters of both SHG movement as well as those who argue for 33% reservation in higher tiers of political representation. The researcher proves that a woman who led SHG/ADS from the front for a reasonable period of time

can lead a panchayat/Municipality or even a State from the front without being a proxy to her husband or a political party. She is capable of exercising her agency with much more confidence than a Non-SHG entrant into politics. Through this study, the researcher proves Kudumbashree, and the reservation system together provides our women ‘an absolutely autonomous space’ wherein they can nurture their political dreams further without any unwanted interventions from the people around them.

2.4 Conclusion

From the literature review presented above, it is clear that women have many hindrances on their way to become political leaders. However, they can be groomed into efficient political leaders if they are given ample opportunities to express their political agency more freely via initiatives like Kudumbashree. Lack of studies which specifically dwelt deep into the stories of those women who have entered into politics with or without Kudumbashree experience inspired the researcher to undertake such a study that discusses their ‘lived experiences’ as non-politicians and blooming politicians. The next chapter is an overview of how women are being kept away from political activism on different pretexts over the centuries, their struggles to claim their well-deserved share at the top of political administration and the factors that lead to the establishment of the Kudumbashree.

CHAPTER III

Women and Political Activism

3.1 Introduction

Many years have passed since Gandhiji said, “*as long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country*”, (CWMG, 1925:108) addressing Women’s Conference in Sojitra, yet there are not many serious attempts to improve women’s presence in public life. A review on the post-independence political picture of India reveals the woefully inadequate representation of women in political parties and legislative bodies. Even the presence of Indira Gandhi as the second longest-serving prime minister could not attract Indian women to politics. On the other hand, constitutional amendments and women reservation brought in substantial participation of women in the grass-roots level politics (Buch, 2010).

In the previous chapter, we have identified women’s obstacles on their way to top leadership in political administration. This chapter highlights the extent of women’s political participation with the help of statistical data pulled out from the Election Commission of India (ECI Statistical Reports of 1951, 1971, 2004, 2014). The second part of this chapter discusses women’s struggles to get a well-deserved share in political leadership, pros and cons of the reservation system and how SHGs can be used as a training platform for upcoming women leaders.

3.2 Are Women Leaders a Rare Species in Kerala? An Enquiry

India, as a democratic, secular and sovereign republic, follows its own constitution which offers equal opportunities for one and all. It has a three-tier governance system in place with a democratically elected parliament at Centre, states and Municipalities/Gram Panchayats. Though women have no restriction in contesting in elections in any of these tiers, their representation is negligibly low in all levels except the last one (Halim et al., 2016). Most researchers in the field suggest the reasons for women's minimal political participation as follows 1. Existence of orthodox traditions in our society. 2. Women's limited exposure to the outside world and lack of educational opportunities 3. Economic dependence of women 4. Domestic and child care responsibilities of women 5. Existence of political parties that follow

patriarchal traditions 6. Increased use of money and muscle power during elections (Thakur, 2010).

If we go through the statistics depicting women's Lok Sabha presence over the last six decades, we can see a steady increase from 1951's 4.40% to 2019's 14.58% MPs (www.prsindia.org/). Still, we have a long way to go before we achieve a meaningful figure (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2003). Kerala sent its first women MP Susheela Gopalan, in the general election conducted in the year 1967 to Parliament from the constituency Ambalapuzha (ECI, 1967:487). In the next general election held in the year 1971, out of four women candidates, only one got elected from Adoor constituency (ECI, 1971:165). However, 63.30 % of women participated in the election as voters (Jayakumar, 2015). In almost all general elections after that Kerala had an impressive women voter 'turn out'; however, it never sent more than two women MPs at a time to Lok Sabha. In the year 2004, both D. Sathidevi and C.S Sujatha were elected from Vadakara and Mavelikkara respectively (ECI, 2004: 183& 196). The current Lok Sabha (17th) has one-woman Parliamentarian from Kerala (www.prsindia.org/). While going through the Rajya Sabha records, it can be seen that the percentage of women members rose from 1952's 6.94% to a nominal 9.50% in 2008 with the highest participation 11.98% recorded in 1980 and 1986 (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2003). The gender-wise break-up of total contestants to Lok Sabha in general elections, reveals a woefully low number of women contestants. However, it has been showing an increasing trend recently.

The picture is not very different for women's representation in the State Legislative Assembly as well. While the current Kerala Assembly (14th) has just nine women members in its legislative body which constitutes 140 democratically elected members, the previous government had seven women legislatures (www.niyamasabha.org). At the same time, states like Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh whose socio-economic development indicators are lower than that of Kerala have more women representation in their state assemblies (Menon-Sen and Shivakumar, 2001). This underlines Kerala women's preference to remain in the sidelines of political power that allows men to be sole decision-makers especially in government bodies and in political parties. In the case of Kerala, where women are said to be enjoying the benefits of early universal education and the social development by breaking the 'glass ceiling' in every other field except politics, their "inertia" to get into politics cannot be

attributed to their “blissful ignorance” alone (Lazao,1995:27) but to their tendency to adhere with the age-old patriarchal norms and also their affinity towards practising conservative feminism. Women, after being politically oppressed for a long time, tend to internalise the idea of ‘self-depreciation’ attune with their oppressors’ impression about them- that they are not born to be politicians (Freire, 1921).

In the first general election after the State’s formation in 1956, it sent six women legislators to the assembly and selected Ayisha Bai as its first deputy speaker. In the same government, K.R Goury Amma became the revenue minister and spearheaded the land reform initiatives of the communist government (kerala.gov.in). In the next election conducted in 1960, out of the 13 women contestants, seven women were elected as legislative members. However, the legislative election in 1967 witnessed a sharp decline in the number of women representatives in the assembly even though 74.08% of women voters exercised their voting rights. (Jayakumar, 2015). In the sixth general election conducted in 1977, Kerala witnessed a 'miracle' of women voters outnumbering men voters by a narrow margin (kerala.gov.in). However, out of 11 women candidates, only one managed to mark the victory. Generally, as I stated earlier, Kerala women's political participation as voters remained higher than the national average in most of the elections and while voting, women preferred to vote for parties rather than individuals. The women contestants’ failure in securing solidarity votes even from their fellow women based on their primary identity, is not a surprise at all given the heterogeneity of Indian society where caste and religion primarily decide one’s political affiliation. Nevertheless, as Halim et al., note, *“states down south have been praised for their egalitarian outlook that promotes redistributive policies compared to northern states where upper caste women are said to be interested in keeping up an elitist status quo”* (2016:8).

In their book, Devika and Thampi (2012) note that via initiatives like People's Planning Campaign (PPC) in 1996, left parties’ in Kerala started including common man's viewpoints in all the development initiatives as part of their 'decentralization' efforts. Besides, they tried to impart gender mainstreaming aspects as well in pursuit of a 'glocal' image (to add global flavour in local development). By placing 'people's perspectives in every developmental issue and recognizing their ability to influence economic growth and social transformation, the left parties in Kerala gave themselves a much-needed facelift attune with the changing global

scenario. They have seen decentralization and participatory citizenship as powerful tools for grassroots development. They were the first one to recognize the importance of keeping women folk under their wings as their "vote" matters in the election process. Slowly, groups, those were once considered 'marginal', like women, Dalits, tribals and fisherfolk have emerged as strong political identities. Suddenly all political parties grabbed this opportunity to start their own women's/tribal wings under them. The interesting fact here is that now we have a women's wing under every other political party who work to promote their parent party's political agenda rather than safeguarding women's rights.

3.3 History of Political Participation of Kerala Women

In our tradition, women tend to keep themselves away from the echelons of political power, leaving the responsibility of making decisions safely with men. For them, political involvement is all about casting their votes during elections. At the same time, men had never been bothered to add much needed 'female' perspectives to most of the legislations they have formulated. They formulate programmes and policies in ways that suit their intentions best. Following women's suffrage movements in the 19th century around the world, many governments acted against discriminatory practices against women and brought in significant changes in their views on women's political participation (Chadha,2014). In India, Gandhiji played an important role in mobilizing women all around the country to take part in our independence movement at the beginning of the 20th century. However, the momentum was lost somewhere down the line, and they were once again pushed aside, and their presence in the political arena became negligibly small. Theoretically, the liberation of Indian women started when it became a democratic republic and adopted its own constitution, which endorsed 'equality' of men and women. However, in practice, apart from exercising the right to vote, women were not keen on entering into lives dedicated to politics alone. Moreover, our political parties were averse of taking in women leaders, especially in the top positions.

The presence of Christian missionaries from the early 19th century acted as a 'game- changer' for the women in Kerala. Though the missionaries' primary aim was to spread Christian faith in the region, they promoted education as well. They opened schools and colleges for women and encouraged them to adopt healthy living practices. During those days, Kerala has witnessed many social reform movements, aimed at abolishing various social evils prevalent

in the society. Lower caste women had to fight against all kinds of atrocities, including their right to dress modestly. The social system existed in those days was extremely unpleasant for women so as they were made to pay 'mulakkaram' - a tax imposed by the ruler if lower caste women wanted to cover their breasts (Divya Arya, July 28, 2016). Whatever freedom and autonomy we have today, is the end product of the struggles of our prior- generations. As a group, women in Kerala came together for the first time during Vaikam Satyagraha 1924-25. (a protest aimed to open up roads to Vaikam temple for the use of lower caste). Leaders like N. Meenakshi and Balammal inspired women to take part actively in such agitations. In 1943, under the banner of "Kerala Mahila Sangham", Kerala women started participating in all kinds of protests aimed at freeing India from British rule (Jayakumar, 2015). Gandhiji's encouragement turned out to be a big boost for the women's participation in all such agitations. In 1947-48, another movement Paliyam Satyagraha aimed at eradicating untouchability also was noted for its high women turn out. During the civil disobedient movement, Kerala women made their presence felt with their strong leadership and organizing skills. Women leaders in those times were not afraid of 'jails' or physical torturing of armed forces. They fought with the same spirit and vengeance as that of their male counterparts. Women leaders like Anna Chandy, Gracy Aaron, Balammal, Akkamma Cheriyan, Annie Mascarene, and Lakshmi Menon actively participated in the freedom struggle. Annie Mascarene had a strong place in Kerala's political history as she was the first lady elected to the Indian Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram (Pulparampil, 2018). Her speeches and writings evoked strong political consciousness among the general public. Lakshmi Menon, who otherwise known as Captain Lakshmi, was one of the founder members of India Women Conference, later became a deputy minister in the cabinet from 1957- 62 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2016:182). Her contributions are widely acknowledged as the Chairperson of several United Nation's commissions. From all these, we can see that during the independence struggle, we have had some great women leaders who made our road to independence smoother. When it comes to the women enfranchisement, Travancore and Cochin were the first Indian States to give voting rights to its women in 1870. Even though it was given to a specific category of women and highly restricted among upper castes, women were allowed to participate in budget discussions and to ask questions (Jayakumar, 2015). Later with an increased opportunity to be educated along

with the passage of multiple legislations made our women, a force to be reckoned with in Kerala's public sphere.

3.4 Political Decentralization and Women Reservation Act- An Overview

Gandhiji, as an ardent advocate of Panchayati Raj, believed that 'self-governing villages' or Gram Swaraj should be the foundation of India's political system. However, India remained a highly centralized state for most of its existence. Though the issue of political decentralization has been cropped up on many occasions since independence, it became a reality only in 1992 with the passage of 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution which are different from the idea of traditional 'khap' panchayats based on caste existed in northern India. Among the committees and commissions appointed to make significant studies regarding the idea of 'decentralization' the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957 suggested a scheme called 'democratic decentralization'. This committee recommended for a three-tier Panchayati Raj System in which Gram panchayat at the grassroots level, Block Panchayat at the intermediate level and District Panchayat at the top level. It recommended statutory status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and introduced an option to co-opt two women who are interested in working among women and children (Sapovadia, 2007). Nagaur district in Rajasthan has implemented this new system on 2nd October 1959 after which many other states followed suit. However, these institutions failed to live up to expectations due to various reasons. Later in 1977 Ashok-Mehta Committee has been appointed to suggest measures to improve these institutions. They identified 'lack of adequate financial resources' as one of the major reasons for its non-performance and suggested some measures like official participation of political parties, appointing a minister for Panchayati Raj alone in the state government and the like. And this committee was the first one to suggest reservation for SC/STs. GVK Rao Committee appointed in 1985, to review administrative arrangement of rural development and poverty alleviation programme, suggested regular elections to PRIs and vested more powers to local bodies for planning, implementing and monitoring rural development programme. Again in 1986 a committee formed under LM Singhvi talked about giving constitutional status to the PRIs and recommended reorganization of villages along with allocating more financial resources. All such discussions paved the way for the passage of 73rd and 74th amendments and due to which the PRIs have evolved into self-governing bodies which promote people's participation in all

levels of its functioning with adequate financial resources. Moreover, it made women reservations mandatory. This provision can be considered as a big leap in the history of women's fight for political power. The historical exclusion of women from public-political power over the centuries has left them 'vulnerable' and 'voiceless'. Various feminist organisations have raised objections regarding the systematic exclusion of 'women' from political power and challenged 'masculine' authority which forced women to stay away from political involvement to take care of family responsibilities. In this scenario, the passage of the Panchayat Raj Act provided them with an opportunity to prove their mettle in the grassroots level politics. In the beginning, neither the top leaders from various political parties nor did the elected women representatives understand the real depth of such a decision. Initially, women had to fight against all the odds to safeguard their position in the PRIs.

As Young (1999) pointed out *"that women's role in governance, in spite of its potential to transform the process and institutions of governance, is constrained by factors like lack gender sensitivity of those concerned, poor access to basic social services like education, unfriendly legal structures and absence of mechanisms which can ensure women's active participation in developmental and political processes for advancement which can facilitate community support to assurance of the rights of women and children"*. (quoted by Radha and Chowdhury, 2002:9) However, after the initial hiccups, women slowly but steadily marched forward by retrieving their lost voice to a certain extent at least in grassroots level as most of the states increased their reservation cap to not less than 50% from earlier 33%. Due to the massive growth in the number of women representatives in local self- governments, issues which are very close to the heart of women like health, education and access to basic services have started receiving immediate attention from the representatives, paving the way for speedy redressal.

The issue of women reservation in legislative assemblies gained momentum once again in 1974-75 with the publication of *"Report on the Status of Women"*. This paper objected the concept of reservation pointing out the ineffectiveness of such a step in the long haul and suggested, *"electoral participation, issue-oriented protests and a larger movement" on the lines of universal franchise targeting* "political equality and effective citizenship of Indian women" (Radha and Chowdhury 2002:10). Although the report and the paper failed to create much impact on the issue, it helped to keep such discussions alive in the public sphere. Later

the “*National Perspective Plan*” in 1988 pointed out the importance of giving “*political power and access to positions of decision making and authority*” (1988:13) to women and the idea became a reality in 1992. Following this landmark decision, women reservation supporters intensified their battle for one-third representation in state legislatures and parliament though they have the right to ask for 50% in all practical purpose. The bill seeking for one-third reservation in the Lok Sabha known as The Constitution (81st Amendment) Bill introduced on September 12th, 1996 has failed to see the light of the day (Halim et.al., 2016). The reintroduced bill in subsequent assemblies of 1998 and 1999 (84th and 85th amendment bill respectively) also faced the same fate due to lack of consensus among political parties. Almost ten years later in 2008, The Constitution (108th amendment) bill/Women’s Reservation bill has been passed in the Rajya Sabha amidst opposing voices to empower our women folks politically, but it never presented in Lok Sabha. Discussions regarding the pros and cons of the reservation have been happening from time to time, keeping this issue alive. However, most of the political parties choose to ignore the quota supporter’s pleas and get on with their ‘patriarchal’ agenda. They treat women as ‘vote bank’ by declaring ‘handouts’ at the time of elections. Keeping women away from politics highlighting petty reasons like ‘rifts’ among members in women associations and spreading lies like elite women leaders may hijack top leadership positions from well-deserved non-elite category and the like should be seen as diversionary tactics by already established men leaders. In any case, as long as an elite woman shows more sensitivity towards problems related to women and children, she should be considered as a better choice than a non-elite insensitive male leader. Reserving one-third seats in Lok Sabha alone may change the lives of approximately 181 women forever, by making them Parliamentarians with special powers and privileges (Chadha, 2014). If it is to be extended to State legislatures, it would undoubtedly create a massive change in our society (Ojha, 2009).

3.5 Panchayati Raj and Kerala Women

The political scenario in Kerala is different from other prominent states in India. In Kerala, besides national parties, regional parties also play a significant role in determining “who is who” of the cabinet. Either the United Democratic Front (UDF) that has Indian National Congress, Indian Union Muslim League and Kerala Congress as major stakeholders or the

coalition of left-leaning political parties- Left Democratic Front (LDF)- alternatively forms state governments. So the seat-sharing within the coalition itself is a major challenge. For regional parties, allocating a few seats to women candidates from their limited share is a tedious task. To appease women fraternity, national parties leave some seats to women who possess no chance of winning. And some women choose to contest independently as well who often fail to garner votes even from their fellow women. All of these make sure that there will not be enough women in the assembly to represent women's needs. Since democracy calls for equal participation of both men and women in the public sphere, it is essential to have an adequate number of women in all decision-making bodies. Therefore, enacting women's quota ensures the presence of at least a minimum number of women in the legislature to add feminine perceptions to governmental policies and programmes. Especially, alternative mechanisms like making recognized parties to allot seats to women in at least one-third of the constituencies, or increasing 33% of the total number of seats, or proposal of ECI to de-recognise all those parties that do not ensure a minimum agreed-on percentage of women as candidates or enabling women to earn their deserved seat share by ensuring equality in terms of access and opportunities, distribution of resources and so on may not yield expected result in our society as it has a history of suppressing women rights over the centuries. Therefore, these options cannot be weighed over the quota system.

Till the enactment of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act in 1994, the state had a single-tiered panchayat system in rural areas and the District Councils in urban areas and had no reservation in place. The state introduced a three-tier system to ensure greater participation of people in the process of development by constituting village, block and district panchayats. By making it a constitutional body, the state endowed more powers and authority to local self-government institutions. After a recent reorganization, Kerala has 941 Gram Panchayats with 15962 electoral wards, 152 Block Panchayats with 2076 electoral wards, 14 District Panchayats with 331 divisions, along with 87 Municipalities and 6 Corporations in the urban areas (State Election Commission Kerala, 2015).

Local planning became more people-centric with the launch of the People's Plan Campaign in 1996 as part of the ninth Five Year plan. It expected stakeholders' active participation in visualising, executing and monitoring of the development programmes. The state

government's decision to devolve 30-40% of the state funds via panchayats has sped up rural development programmes (Issac and Heller, 2003). To identify the 'felt needs' of the people "Gram Sabhas" are convened in every village using participatory techniques. Monitoring and evaluation of development projects in the panchayats are also done in 'Gram Sabha' meetings with the active involvement of the stakeholders themselves.

Panchayat Raj Act treated women as a special category and offered multiple opportunities for them to be involved in the process of their 'own' upliftment. As per the act, every panchayat has to earmark 10% of its state grand- in- aid for designing and implementing women-centric projects. However, many studies have found that most of the Panchayats in Kerala spent all this money on mundane activities like setting up of petty shops, gardening and the like. Designing innovative and sustainable programmes targeting younger lots in the Panchayats along with various skill development programmes, are suggested by many experts in this area to sustain people's interests in participatory rural development programmes for longer.

The most promising feature of the act was that it made women's entry into politics possible by providing a constitutional guarantee, overturning the aversion of major political parties, to bring in more women into political leadership at least in the local self-government institutions. Women all on a sudden found themselves in positions that allow them to challenge 'men' in different ways and slowly they proved all their detractors wrong with their managerial skills. After all, their experience in managing a household with limited resources should come in handy for them while planning effective utilization of available resources in a Panchayat. In addition to that, women's aversion to demand bribery had cut short corruption to a greater extent (Engendering Development, 2001). However, we cannot expect a drastic change in the system that suppressed women's rights over the centuries with a meagre rise in the percentage of them in local-level politics especially when a good percentage among them are said to be proxies of influential male members (Linderg et al., 2011). In such a scenario, the existence of SHGs could be beneficial in generating political consciousness and in inculcating leadership skills among women to a great extent. Their stint with SHGs has the potential to improve their feminist consciousness as well as to bring out visible changes in the articulation of new ideas. Improved visibility in the social circle of the community as a result of their SHG involvement is synonymous with their ability to attract attention from policymakers which in turn will

reduce their vulnerability and improve their efficiency to use public resources better. Therefore, the researcher feels that leaderships skills developed as a result of their SHG involvement coupled with their entry into politics backed by constitutional guarantee can be considered as an effective way to include 'women's voice' and concerns too in the process of rebuilding our nation.

Women's innate capacity to identify and respond to the needs of the downtrodden and neglected category of people in the society has changed the way of governance in the grassroots level by adding the much needed 'humanity' touch in all developmental issues. They give preference to issues related to water, education, health and alcohol abuse. Here also their experience as a self-help group member comes handy in mobilizing resources and organising mass movements against social evils (Lazao,1995). According to Sapovadia (2007:4) on her way to political leadership, a woman has to overcome many hurdles like *"inadequate education, the burden of reproductive and productive roles, a lack of self-confidence and the opposition of entrenched cultural and religious views etc."*. Therefore, he insists on the importance of establishing a strong bond among women's organisations and elected bodies to develop solidarity amongst women. Establishing self-help groups have the potential to solve most of the problems mentioned above. Active involvement in the SHG activities ensures strong solidarity among women folks in the area, and this will provide an enabling environment wherein women leaders can blossom into influential political leaders. In this regard, their stint with SHG proved to be beneficial in giving them both technical training as well as in developing a feminist consciousness attune with the changing times. Moreover, such groups can act as 'schools of democracy' that offers basic lessons of political processes through participatory methods. In the weekly meetings of the SHGs, women get the opportunity to lead and participate in discussions and debates. The primary lessons of negotiation, execution of power, conflict resolution and the like can also be picked up from their tenure as a leader in SHG (Cagatay 1998, John 2009, Thileepan and Soundararajan 2014, Sudipta and Debnarayan 2011, Yogendrarajah 2013, Rajendran 2012, Sahu and Singh 2012).

3.6 Conclusion

In short, women's presence in PRIs has far-reaching consequences, as it has transformed the way Indian politics treated its women over the centuries. The review of extant literature proves that the SHG movement also contributes towards their political participation by providing them with multiple options to improve their self- confidence and assertiveness. The next chapter presents a detailed evaluation of the origin and evolution of Kudumbashree initiative in Kerala.

Chapter IV

The Origin and Evolution of Kudumbashree in Kerala

4.1 Introduction

As an effective way to alleviate poverty by empowering women economically, socially and politically, the Kudumbashree movement has gained global attention and nationwide acknowledgement. The current chapter traces the origin and evolution of the Kerala government's flagship poverty alleviation Programme Kudumbashree, designed to expand poor women's socio-economic and political opportunities. Besides, it briefly explores the membership criteria and the organisational structure of the movement, which has the potential to instill leadership dreams into the minds of its young and vibrant participants.

The concept of organising women and other marginalised groups into neighbourhood groups known as self-help groups (SHGs) based on microcredit is considered as a tool for sustainable development, as it serves as a medium for empowerment, financial inclusion and rural development. In a country like India, where the reach of both central and state governments to remote villages is well beyond satisfactory, the importance of strengthening local self-government institutions with more funding and power is a sheer necessity. By the passage of Panchayati Raj Act in 1992, Panchayats across the country became local powerhouses literally with more power in the matters related to village administration. For the effective implementation of the poverty eradication programmes, local governments have to work in unison with the higher levels of government (Oommen and Ghosh, 2005). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of treating poor as agents of development instead of 'objects' of development. Planning and implementing micro-level interventions with the active involvement of the local governments with the active participation of the stakeholders through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) is found to be a successful model for rural development (Issac and Heller, 2003).

Formation of self-help groups encourages people to work together for a common goal in order to form social capital for their all-round development (Putnam, 2000 and John, 2009). Besides, linking them with microcredit programmes to enhance the scope for income generation

programmes and savings effectively alleviate poverty among rural masses (Sivachithappa, 2013). Our traditional financial institutions often neglect the credit needs of rural people. Fearing 'default' they never issued small scale loans to them at reasonable interest rates. This failure of the formal credit system along with governmental apathy towards the struggling rural population often forces them to live in utter helplessness and poverty. To address this problem, Muhammad Yunus kick-started a movement in Bangladesh in 1976, in association with 'The Grameen Bank' to disburse loan among poor women (Juja, 2014). Around the same time, Ela Ramesh Bhatt founder member of 'Self-Employed Women's Association' (SEWA), had started working on the concept of women and microfinance. Following its success, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, (NABARD) had entered in the field of social development by actively promoting such groups. By early 1990s, the concept of sustainable development by organising poor people through CBOs with local self-government's participation became a serious debate among social scientists around the world especially after NABARD started promoting SHGs on a large scale (Siwal, 2009). The first Microcredit World Summit held in Washington DC in 1997, had started a movement "*to escort 100 million of the world's poorest families out of utter poverty*" by 2005 by providing microloans and other financial services, especially to women to start their own small-scale business ventures. By this time, there were many takers for the system as they realized its tremendous potential to reach out to the millions of low-income families across the globe. The campaign relaunched in 2006 November with targets including reaching out to 175 million poorest families with credit for self-employment and other financial services and helping 100 million families lift themselves out of extreme poverty (microcreditsummit. org). The summit has also recognized the importance of empowering women and has been noted that businesses run by women tend to benefit family members more directly than those run by men. Thus, a silent revolution which had a humble beginning in the early 1980s has eventually reached more than 137 million poor borrowers by 2011, mostly women, with microloans and other financial and social services (Sample, 2011).

Micro enterprises established as part of the SHG movement enhanced women's and other economic and socially marginalized group's ability to earn significantly. Gradually SHGs have emerged as one of the best available sources for informal credit to the rural poor. Self- help initiatives sustain on members' solidarity and mutual understanding. Therefore, homogeneity

in the socio-economic background of the participants is an essential prerequisite for its success. Their collective responsibility guarantees the timely repayment of disbursed loans (Sahu and Singh 2012). The success of the group depends on the ability of its participants to make decisions on credit, savings, interest rate, repayment period and the like unanimously. SHGs operate on the principle of “*collective capabilities*”. As Ibrahim (2006: 397) notes, “*self- help initiatives are a perfect illustration of how individuals can choose to act collectively to seize an economic or social opportunity. While doing it in groups, they can easily pool in all their resources to initiate favourable social changes within a short period*”. SHGs help the poor to expand their capabilities economically- by opening up new windows for earning, socially- by building up social capital and politically- by improving grassroots participation in local governance. Self-help initiatives undoubtedly enhance the social security of extremely poor and vulnerable. When in collectives, the poor and vulnerable express their agency very effectively and confidently. As a result, they develop “critical consciousness” which enable them to think critically about their own problems, to express their discontent more effectively and to find their own solutions to their problems. Its ability to generate confidence and self-reliance, among women, is noted by many scholars, as discussed in the second chapter. According to Gaonkar and Henriques (2013), the main functions of SHGs are;

1. to root out exploitation of the poor
2. to inculcate confidence in them
3. to improve financial self-reliance among the poor in the rural areas

In addition to the functions mentioned above, SHGs are found to be instrumental in improving participants' social and political status as well (Ramesh, 2007). For example, John (2009:50) found that in the 2005 election to the local bodies, out of 3200 contestants who had Kudumbashree background, more than 1400 had won. Moreover, it provides them with a platform to meet regularly with an agenda of helping each other in every possible way, to help themselves. SHGs generally consist of people with similar socio-economic profile, who come together voluntarily to save small amounts of money to enhance their financial status by engaging in different income-generating activities (Sanyal et al., 2012). They circulate their hard-earned money among themselves and use their collective consciousness to make sure that the money is well spent and its timely repayment by the borrowers (Deivam, 2008).

4.2 Evolution of Kudumbashree

The idea of organising women into groups known as Mahila Mandals and Mahila Samajams was first introduced during the second five-year plan (1956-61) under the newly formed Social Welfare Board (Kaur, 2018). However, the idea of women-centred groups took a back seat in the next two five-year plans when the focus was shifted to educating girl children and improving women's health. In 1980, with the announcement of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the discussion about the employment generation for rural women resurfaced along with other vital elements like health and education. Though this programme was aimed at comprehensive development of rural population, it received criticisms because of widely spread malpractices, corruption and inefficiencies involved in the execution of the programme and the like (Amarendra, 1998). Moreover, it was designed to address the practical needs instead of treating the root causes of the existing problems. So later, in 1982, another programme titled “Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas” (DWCRA) was launched aiming at overall development with special emphasis on women’s empowerment through collective action (Damayanthi, 1999). Gradually by the time of 8th five-year plan government’s idea of women’s ‘development’ transformed into ‘empowerment’ approach (Kaur, 2018). And by early 1990s, the government introduced another programme “Mahila Samridhi Yojana” (MSY) with a strong intent to financially empower women by encouraging them to invest in small saving schemes.

In 1987-88, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of India, launched a poverty alleviation Programme known as Urban Basic Services (UBS) in certain parts of Kerala (John, 2009). The idea of using Community-Based Organisation or CBOs effectively to alleviate urban poverty came into existence for the first time, and the project adopted a new name “Urban Basic Services (UBSP) for the poor. In addition to central and state government, UNICEF also contributed financially towards its implementation in Ernakulum and Alappuzha. Later a survey carried out by UNICEF as part of their Community-Based Nutrition Programme (CBNP) with a target of improving the health of women and children identified nine characteristics of poverty. In 1992-94 they developed this system further and established a 9- point poverty index to identify those who are genuinely poor for studying nature and causes of poverty (Siwal, 2009). The simple and transparent method of 9-point poverty index enabled

the implementing agency to identify the poorest of poor easily and plan its intervention strategies accordingly. This identification criterion was multifaceted and offered 126 possible ways of finding a low-income family without relying too much on the 'income' factor alone. Following its success, the state government implemented the programme in all urban local bodies by the end of 1994.

From the success of the schemes mentioned above, the government and non- governmental organisations realized the importance of stakeholder participation in planning, implementing and monitoring of such programmes. The idea of constituting neighbourhood groups (NHGs) and federating them to form Community Development Societies (CDS) had used for the very first time for this project. The same CDS model was found to be successful in developing 'Malappuram Rural Model' targeting the uplift of one of the most underdeveloped districts in Kerala in association with UNICEF. Later the state government established a special Urban Poverty Alleviation Cell (UPA Cell) in 1995 to coordinate all the activities related to community development (John, 2009).

Having been tasted the success in CDS based development programme in both districts, the government of Kerala initiated a statewide programme known as Kudumbashree Mission on 17th May 1998 to alleviate poverty by organizing and empowering women (thekudumbashreestory.info). This was a joint venture of State UPA cell, Kerala State Planning Board and the NABARD to eradicate poverty. The Malayalam words 'shree' means 'prosperity' and 'Kudumbam' means family, so the term '*Kudumbashree*' means bringing 'prosperity' into families. Since Kudumbashree was launched after the Panchayati Raj Act, it was envisaged to work under the guidance and leadership of the LSGIs in the area and the Poverty Eradication Mission became a part of the department of local self- government with strong backing from NABARD. Linking Kudumbashree with LSGIs not only ensured better coordination among different governmental departments but also facilitated the organization of the poor and marginalized more effectively. It envisaged the "*alleviation of absolute poverty within ten years by concerted community action under the leadership of local self-governments by converging available services and resources by attacking various dimensions and manifestations of the poverty*" (John, 2009:11). Furthermore, the researcher felt, this programme adopted a women-oriented participatory approach as women's socio-economic

and political empowerment has far-reaching consequences compared with men centric approaches. The proponents of this programme truly believe in the ability of women to bring in prosperity to their families if they are provided with ample opportunities to expand their economic, social and political prospects further, and the mission's sole objective is to *"reaching out to families through women and reaching out to community through families"* (Williams et al., 2011:16).

By 2003 this programme which provided sustainable livelihood options to its participants reached every nook and corner of the state (thekudumbashreestory.info). State Minister for Local Self Governments (LSG), is the Chairman of the governing body of "State Poverty Eradication Mission" (SPEM), a society under which Kudumbashree is formally registered. In each district, Kudumbashree has a district coordinating officer to support and facilitate the community network across the state. As per Kudumbashree's annual report of 2008-09, there was 1.94 lakh NHGs, over 17,000 ADSs and 1061 CDSs in the State. By 31st March 2019 its total membership reached up to 43,93,579 with 2,91,507 NHGs, 19,489 ADSs and 1064 CDSs (kudumbashree.org). However, families live in tribal hamlets, migrant women and certain sections of the coastal population are found to be conspicuously absent from the movement (Shihabudheen, 2013). In Kottayam district, Kudumbashree has 2,31,859 members as on January 1st 2020 under 78 CDSs (kudumbashree.org).

The three building blocks of Kudumbashree are microfinance, entrepreneurship and empowerment. And it views poverty holistically and treats it accordingly. With this multi-faceted approach, Kudumbashree tries hard to restore their rights and voices so that they can lead a much more dignified life. The programme believes in the collectivization of voices. The mission's primary aim is to contribute substantially towards elevating the overall status of the women by making them financially independent through small saving mobilization and establishing micro-enterprises. Achievement of financial independence is said to be a booster for social and political empowerment. Kudumbashree successfully brings women together from all walks of life and encourage them to fight for their empowerment. While in collectivities, it becomes very easy for them to 'voice' their opinion with more assertiveness. The collective 'voice' of the poor becomes too strong for the government to ignore especially,

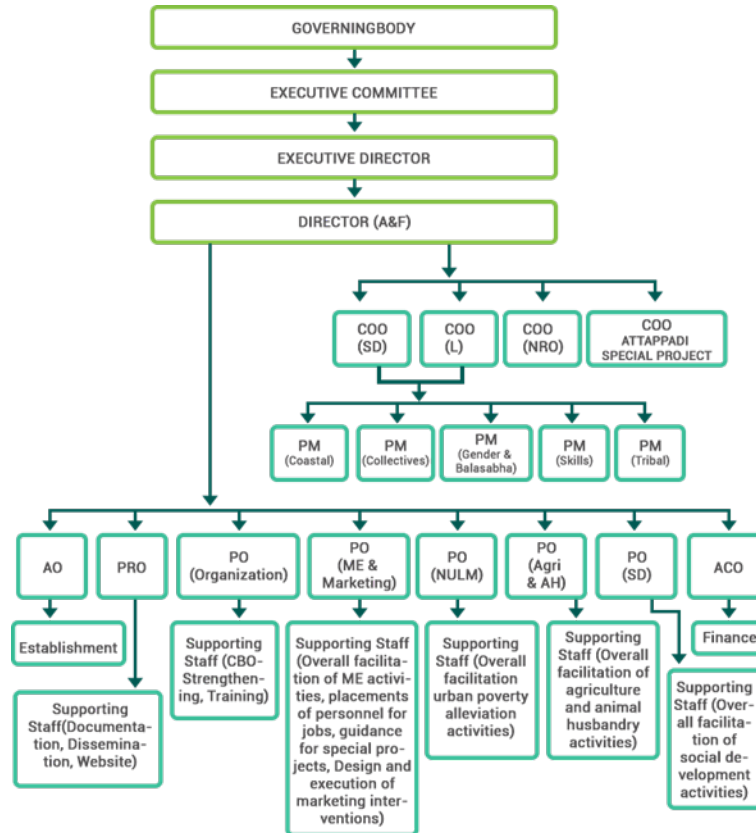
when women protest over a wide range of social evils like alcoholism, selling of tobacco products near to schools.

A review of programmes and policies formulated by the government for women empowerment, for the last seven decades revealed that the ‘ignorance’ of women prevents them from achieving the much-needed equity rather than the absence of innovative programmes. Ultimately their failure to recognize themselves as ‘as capable as men’ and their willful surrender to the patriarchal ideologies prevent them from enjoying the benefits of such programmes wholeheartedly. They treat themselves as weak and wait ‘patiently’ for their turns to be uplifted by someone (either government agencies or NGOs) glorifying a distant past where women were said to be enjoying equal status as that of men. Our system which embraced patriarchal values as its guiding force shares an equal responsibility as well. When women were given opportunities to enhance their economic freedom via small saving schemes as mentioned above, they preferred to utilize it under the strict supervision of their male counterparts (Williams et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be seen that such policies and programmes of the government have not garnered enough strength to challenge “*structural, systemic, and/or institutionalized forms of subordination, oppression, and/or exploitation*” (Biewener and BaCqué, 2015:67).

4.3 Organisational Structure of Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree is formally registered under the Travancore Kochi Literary Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955 and implemented by “State Poverty Eradication Mission” (SPEM) (John, 2009). The state minister for LSGI chairs the governing body. An executive committee constituting seven members with Principal Secretary of LSG as chairman guides and facilitates the entire activities of Kudumbashree at the State level. And also, each District has a Kudumbashree district mission office to support and coordinate its activities.

Figure 4:1 The Organizational Structure of Kudumbashree Mission (State level)



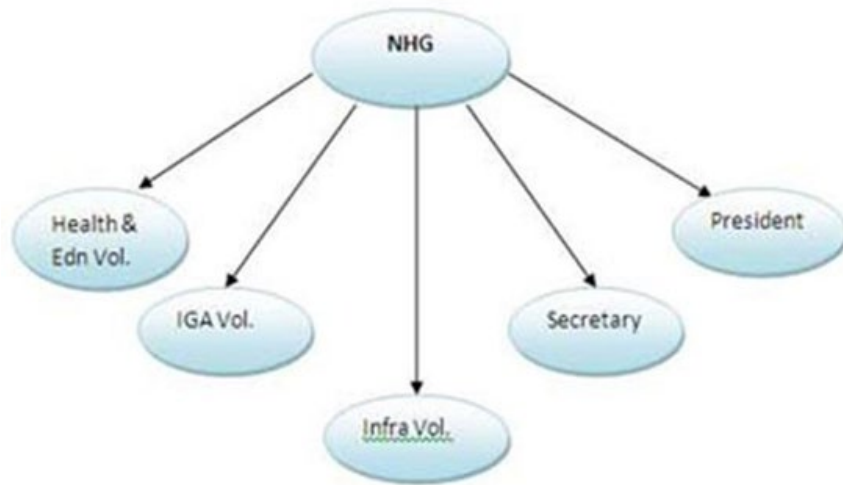
(Source: kudumbashreemission.org)

4.3.1. Organisational Structure-At Community level

Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are designed as a three-tiered structure with NHGs, at the lower level and CDS as its apex tier which is affiliated to Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) and ADS as the middle tier.

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) “*Ayalkkoottangal*”- the basic building units of the mission constituted 10-20 women from the neighbourhood. A five-member committee (Figure 4:2) elected democratically by the members is responsible for the day to day activities of the group, including credit and thrift activities. Usually, meetings are conducted once in a week, in any one of the member’s house.

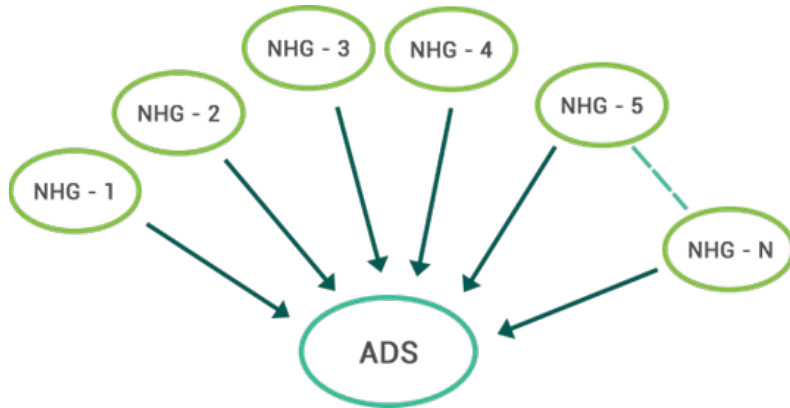
Figure 4:2 NHG



(Source: kudumbashreemission.org)

Area Development Society (ADS) – Figure 4.3 represents an ‘ADS’ in an electoral ward. Representatives elected from all the federated NHGs (presidents, secretaries and three sectoral volunteers of the federated NHGs) form its general body. Besides, it has a governing body consists of the President, Secretary and five members elected from the members of the general body with the Gram Panchayat ward member as its patron to guide and monitor. According to John (2009), the basic responsibility of ADS is to coordinate and monitor the basic responsibility of ADS is to coordinate and monitor all the activities of federated NHGs. It facilitates NHG’s bank linkage programme as well as speeds up the procedures for getting bank loans. Balasabha and teenage clubs are formed under ADS to encourage social activities among children and teenagers. It is the responsibility of ADS to integrate micro plans submitted by the federated NHGs into suitable mini-plans and makes all the necessary arrangements for its implementation (kudumbashree.org).

Figure 4:3 ADS



(Source: kudumbashreemission.org)

Community Development Society (CDS) is a registered body formed after federating all the ADSs in a Panchayat/Municipality or Corporation level. It also has a general body and a governing body to facilitate and coordinate its activities. The president of the Gram Panchayat serves as the patron of CDS. In the case of municipality/corporation, a monitoring and advisory committee is formed with Mayor/Municipal Chairperson as the convener (kudumbashree.org). The major responsibilities of the CDS include continuous evaluation and appraisal of various Kudumbashree activities. The responsibility of implementing Bavanashree and Harithashree lies with the CDS. It also conducts an audit of all affiliated NHGs and ADSs. In addition to overseeing all the activities of ADS, it probes for the possibilities of expanding women members' social and economic opportunities by starting micro-enterprises or by helping them to connect with various semi-government and non-government agencies (John, 2009).

In the weekly meetings conducted by NHGs, group members ardently discuss all problems related to their daily life and develop their own solutions. The group functions democratically with internally elected representatives. It allows them to acquire basic leadership skills and the much needed 'visibility' in the social circle. Once they are elected, they have the opportunity to represent their group in ADS and CDS levels, which enhances their leadership capabilities further. NHG provides rural women with a common *"platform where they discover themselves- their strengths, weaknesses and possibilities"* (Shihabudheen, 2013:12) to enhance their economic, social and political status.

4.4 Kudumbashree's Specialties and Three Major Roles

After reviewing many initiatives like the Kudumbashree mission the researcher felt that it differs from most of such initiatives in the following aspects;

1. It focuses exclusively on women empowerment, and it operates through them, and it recognizes women's ability to be effective agents of local development.
2. It addresses gender gaps in literacy and inculcates entrepreneurial skills and view them as effective ways to ensure their wholistic empowerment.
3. The ultimate aim of group formation and working in groups of 15-25, is "self-improvement" through group activities.
4. It has a unique and well-structured organizational set up from grassroots level to the topmost administrative position of Executive Director.
5. It uses a nine-point non-economic scale to recruit its members and treats poverty as a multidimensional problem.
6. The mission has a statewide presence and has been functioning as an autonomous body with the eligibility to receive funding from domestic and international sources (Williams et al., 2011).

In general, Kudumbashree's three, major roles can be summarized as follows;

1. **Thrift and credit activities:** All NHGs encourage regular group-based savings (usually a very small amount of money) to create a revolving credit fund from which members can avail money for different purposes. According to Williams et al., 2011:6 "financially it helps them to smooth over shortfalls in household income, reduce their reliance on private money lenders and to connect NHGs to the formal credit system with group savings providing collateral for loans from commercial banks." Moreover, it inculcates a regular saving habit among them and encourages them to be financially disciplined.
2. **Micro- enterprises:** In order to enhance participant's and their family's economic well- being, they are encouraged to start small scale business ventures with the active support of all government departments (Nidheesh, 2009). From providing subsidized credit to inculcating entrepreneurial skills, the state government lends its active support to every NHGs under the mission.

3. **Participatory Development:** Even though Kerala has many other self-help groups under various non-governmental organisations, Kudumbashree is the only one which provides poor women with a chance to become micro-planners via ADSs and CDSs which has a definite role in Panchayats'/municipalities annual planning process (kudumbashree.org). It has been noted that in villages where active Kudumbashree units are existing, the number of women attending annual 'Gram Sabha' meetings is high (Williams et al., 2011, Biju and Kumar 2013, Nidheesh 2009).

4.5 How does “Kudumbashree” Bring in “Shree” or “Prosperity ” to Rural Families?

Kudumbashree is established to bring in prosperity to rural households just as the word implies. The prosperity that Kudumbashree envisions has multiple aspects.

4.5.1 Economic prosperity

Numerous studies (Arun et al., 2011, Oommen 2008, Christabel, 2013) have reported about the socio-economic transformation as a result of merging Kudumbashree's community structure with local self-governance in most of the Kerala villages. Massive employment generation and an enhanced local production ensure better living conditions even for poorest of poor. The members of the NHGs are encouraged and offered financial help to undertake income generation activities to enhance their economic status (Nidheesh, 2009). NHG's active involvement in other central government programmes like the National Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), ensures its success as well as a steady income for participant's households (Ali and George, 2019). Under a programme called 'Samagra', the state government is providing subsidy, training, technology up-gradation, market intervention support, procurement support and the like to micro-entrepreneurs (John, 2009). Another milestone in the history of Kudumbashree is their initiative to step into collective farming (Siwal, 2009). The researcher feels that women's role as cultivators rather than agricultural labourers may help them to have more control over means of production as well as improve their access to formal credit help. Moreover, the economic independence of rural women enables them to contribute towards household expenses which in turn enhances their decision-making powers. And not so surprisingly, the state expects women to spend any extra income they earn through their Kudumbashree activities for the welfare of their families and thus opens

up room for the critics to allege that this programme, in fact, supports women's independence only within the existing patriarchal norms and thus reaffirms their role as 'caregivers' in the family. The study by Sahu L and S.K Singh (2012), suggests a positive correlation between women's increased access to credit and their capacity to voice their opinions on matters related to finance and purchasing in their families. However, Oommen's study in 2008 fails to prove Kudumbashree's ability to provide "sustained" economic empowerment to its participants although it suggests a direct association between Kudumbashree and women's empowerment in various other spheres. This study noted improvements in the capability of poor to borrow, to bargain collectively, to plan and execute projects and also in their leadership capabilities including self-confidence and their awareness about gender rights. The studies of Nidheesh (2009), Shihabudheen (2013) also report very low income from the micro-enterprises run by Kudumbashree members due to their poor marketing abilities and strategies. Therefore, some critics view it as a programme to turn poor women into poor entrepreneurs who are now left with the additional responsibility of managing unprofitable or non-viable businesses.

4.5.2 Social Prosperity

With its strong commitment towards the upliftment of the rural poor, Kudumbashree, designed and implemented the programme, ASRAYA- Destitute Identification Rehabilitation and Monitoring Project. CBO members and their elected representatives were actively involved in identifying and carrying out Asraya's activities, including mobilizing fund from different sources, under the guidance of the local self-government (kudumbashree.org). Initiatives like BUDS- special schools for mentally challenged in collaboration with local self- government bring smiles back to many families as they are able to leave their mentally challenged children in BUDS. To enhance children's holistic development, Kudumbashree has initiated Balasabha as well. Its participants – children belonged to 10 to 15 age group from poor families- are given opportunities to develop their innate potentials through debates, discussions and plays (John, 2009). The Holistic Health Programme is also implemented in order to enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the children with special emphasis on sports activities. For this, the CDS provides inputs while local self-government chips in with infrastructure facilities and Kudumbashree provides coordination and support. Another Kudumbashree initiative known as Tribal special project in collaboration with tribal department aimed at bringing

marginalized tribals under the aegis of the Kudumbashree network and provides them with facilities which are otherwise less accessible or denied to them (kudumbashree.org). As part of Kudumbashree's Gender Self-learning Programme (GSLP) lessons on gender issues have been prepared and deliberated in NHGs with the help of a resource person. The researcher feels that using highly contextualized learning materials laced with real-life experiences as an alternative for traditional awareness-building programmes can leave a sustainable impact on listeners. Furthermore, Kudumbashree activities encourage them to be socially active which in turn, would improve their social 'visibility' significantly (Williams et al., 2011, Shihabudheen, 2013). And the researcher feels that, if the participants could make use of weekly meetings and other training programmes as a platform to mingle with resource persons and other prominent leaders in the community, it would definitely expand their horizon of knowledge, and thus to become more aware of the exploitation by people around them. There have been instances in which women groups actively fought against social evils and brought about social changes. For example, Nidheesh (2009) reports an increment in the number of women who participate in the anti-liquor campaigns and highlights the same as an example for their increased social responsibility as a result of their Kudumbashree participation.

While the government of Kerala initiated "Nirbhaya and Crime Mapping" to prevent sexual abuse and harassments against women and children, it had made use of Kudumbashree Mission's wide network at the community level to reach out to the victims of sexual violence (kudumbashree.org). Moreover, Kudumbashree members' strong association with the local self-governments and other institutions and agencies in the area had made its implementation smoother. As part of this programme gender sensitization programmes were conducted for resource persons, elected representatives of LSGIs and CDS representatives throughout the selected areas for its pilot implementation. According to the information given in Kudumbashree mission website, a new tool has been developed by "Kudumbashree Gender Team" to assess the details of atrocities faced by the women of selected CDSs. The process included issue mapping and crime spotting. While the former gives a detailed picture of the atrocities committed, the latter help the authorities to identify the places where such atrocities take place.

4.5.3 Political Prosperity

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act was enacted in 1994 following the earlier (1992) 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution in the Parliament that ensured a minimum of 33% of women in PRIs. Later, it increased up to a minimum of 50% in Kerala which resulted in an increased demand for women leaders at the grassroots level (Devika, 2016). Eventually, the Kudumbashree mission ended up as a reservoir for women politicians from where the political parties draw efficient leaders who could build strong ground support for the party. As mentioned earlier, 3200 of them were contested in the panchayat election of 2005 and 1408 of them had won (Oommen, 2008 and John, 2009). In the panchayat election of 2011, a steep increase had been reported in the number of contestants with Kudumbashree affiliation. As per Yamuna (2011), out of 11,624 contestants, 5,404 marked their victory. In the election of 2015, the number of contestants further increased to 15,863 out of which 7,376 marked their victories (kudumbashree.org). Another study by Oommen (2007) also found an increment in different dimensions of empowerment including their organizational and leadership capabilities. In the three-tier system followed by Kudumbashree's CBOs, women get to choose their own representatives (John, 2009). This may be considered as a stepping stone to a career in politics, especially for those who are interested in leading others from the front. Theoretically, Kudumbashree meetings should be an ideal place where the participants discuss political issues and thus to improve their knowledge about political and legal rights. However, in practice, its participants spend more time and energy to carry out thrift and credit activities, ignoring the importance of holistic development (Siwal, 2009).

Politically empowered women have the ability to organize and mobilize for social change. Strong leaders are always quick to find a way to transform their individual awareness into collective action aiming at long term sustainable social transformation. For them, their tenure as SHG leaders is nothing but a learning phase before trying their luck in larger political fields. (Ramesh, 2007, Sanyal et al., 2012, John, 2009, Oommen 2007). An instance from the recent past, in which Kudumbashree members sat on a day and night agitation in October 2012, with the strong support of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) against then government's (UDF; 2011-2016) proposal to reverse the process of decentralization proves

that collectivities of poor women can, in fact, act as political pressure groups. Biju and Kumar (2013) report this as a success of women empowerment through decentralization effort.

4.6 Kudumbashree's significance in Kerala's Fight Against Floods and COVID-19

Kerala faced two unprecedented flood situations during the monsoon seasons of 2018 and 2019 which left lakhs of people homeless. Together with other government mechanisms, Kudumbashree CBOs also put their best efforts into flood relief works by actively involving in cleaning, collection and distribution of essentials and the like. Among all, the most heart touching one was their initiative to share their homes with 'homeless'. According to Kudumbashree.org 38,698 families were accommodated in NHG member's houses. The number of Kudumbashree members registered to take part in the cleaning campaign was 4,04,949 out of which 7515 were from Kottayam (Athira, 2018). They expressed their solidarity and sisterhood in times of calamity by coming forward to help most affected districts in the state. Under the leadership of the Collector, Kottayam district administration distributed 3000 Take-home-kits with the help of 80 food packing volunteers from Kudumbashree (Aishwarya, 2018). During these difficult times, the Kudumbashree ran community kitchens in Pathanamthitta sent out 700 food packets on an average per day for five days (Sarika, 2018). Through their gender help desk, 'Snehita' and the Community counselling programme, the Kudumbashree mission provided counselling services to flood affected people (Soya Thomas, 2018). According to Renu (2018), the Kudumbashree mission supplied 8901kg of nutritional food supplement known as "Amrutham Nutrimix" to children under three years of age. In addition to this, according to Bipin Jose (2018), State Programme Manager, its members donated a sum of seven crores to Chief Ministers Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF) on 29/08/2018. To raise this amount, many NHGs had to cancel their Onam celebrations. According to Rajesh (2018), the Kudumbashree mission is planning to help the government's initiative called 'Nava Kerala Lottery' through its widespread CBO networks and thus to raise more fund for CMDRF. Moreover, Kudumbashree has been selected as the nodal agency for implementing Resurgent Kerala Loan Scheme (RLGS) from which affected people can avail loan up to one lakh to repair their homes and to meet other immediate needs (Priya Paul, 2018). And according to Ajith Chacko (2018), Kudumbashree mission has long term plans to involve

in the reconstruction efforts of the State by collaborating with various NGOs. From all these, it is evident that Kudumbashree had played an inevitable role in Kerala's fight for survival in both seasons of floods.

Despite their 'own' hardships and the struggle for existence, the Kudumbashree members showed extraordinary perseverance and leadership skills and joined forces with the state government when it mattered the most. To make it clear, the researcher likes to bring forth their contributions towards the State's efforts to contain the global pandemic Covid-19. The Kudumbashree mission, through its CBOs, had spread awareness regarding the importance of social distancing and spearheaded the movement "break the chain" targeted to keep the people of Kerala especially those who are above 60 years of age within the safety of their homes and to encourage frequent handwashing. To make information dissemination easier, the Kudumbashree mission took the initiative to create 1.9 lakh WhatsApp groups with 22 lakhs of its participants from all the three layers of CBOs to keep them informed about government instructions (kudumbashree.org). Furthermore, Civil Supplies Department of Government of Kerala has been using Kudumbashree's expertise to stitch grocery kits which are to be distributed among 85 lakh families in the State with essential food grains (New Indian Express, April 7, 2020). When the demand for sanitizers and other personal hygiene products shot up, the Kudumbashree mission rose to the occasion, identified 306 tailoring units and 21 toiletry making units and started making them in bulk. In Malappuram district alone they made 1.25 lakhs of cotton reusable masks for a reasonable price (Times of India, March 26, 2020). Kudumbashree members have been running 1144 community kitchens with the help of LSGIs across Kerala. Out of these, 416 are budget hotels which provide meals at a meagre amount of ₹20/-per meal and is affordable to all (kudumbashree.org). Moreover, Kudumbashree in association with UNICEF has enlisted 2176 resource persons to call the families with elderly members once in five days to enquire about their well-being. And they take all the necessary steps to ensure that they are fed through community kitchens and are treated through Primary Health Centers (Manorama Online, May 22, 2020). On both occasions in addition to offering their voluntary services, Kudumbashree mission did their best to monetise their skills which ensured the survival of their own families. Instances like this prove beyond doubt that Kudumbashree has become an integral part of Kerala government's welfare projects and their volunteerism had saved the State during turbulent times.

4.7 The Role PRI's in Strengthening Kudumbashree Mission

The enactment of Panchayati Raj Act in 1992 by central government clears the path for Kerala Panchayati Raj in 1994. Since then, Kerala's local government system has been working within this legal framework. In 1996, with the implementation of Peoples planning Programme, Kerala government strengthened the system further by ensuring people's active presence in the process of decentralization. Kerala follows a three-tier Panchayati Raj System. While designing the Kudumbashree mission, the government tactfully decided to link it with PRIs so that the activities of the former will always have the financial and infrastructure backing of the later. In addition to the funds channelized through the local government, the Kudumbashree mission gets budgetary support from the state government as well to meet its administrative costs (John, 2009). The decision to earmark 10 % of the plan fund only towards women empowerment schemes was a significant boost to their morale. Apart from this Kudumbashree mission gets financial benefits from various central government projects. Programmes like the "National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme" opted Kudumbashree as its nodal agency. Through bank linkage facility, members avail loans from both the public sector and scheduled banks (Siwal, 2009). The partnership between self-governments and CBOs of Kudumbashree has turned out to be a successful one in identifying beneficiaries of different government-sponsored programmes like Bhavanasree, Asraya and lease land farming. However, the decision to link Kudumbashree and PRIs failed to impress feminist thinkers as they believed it might cause increased 'governmentalisation' in women-centred programmes (Kawrla and Thampi, 2012) which in turn would affect women's agency adversely. The well organized and result-yielding activities of Kudumbashree mission (especially during calamities like floods and Covid-19) contradicts the view of feminist thinkers which portrays link between PRIs and Kudumbashree as a catalyst for governmentalisation with an adverse effect on women's agency. While a few critics brand Kudumbashree as a venture to transform 'poor women' into 'poor entrepreneurs' the movement has captured worldwide attention with its innovativeness and efficiency. The newspaper reports (New Indian Express, April 7, 2020, and Times of India, March 26, 2020) from recent times indicate that Kudumbashree is no longer churns out poor entrepreneurs as it did previously, ever since it started "monetizing" their skills and established networks to undertake bulk government orders to make cloth carry bags, masks and other sanitary products and run affordable hotel chains. However, the question arises here is whether

Kudumbashree can successfully maintain its current momentum that achieved under the Left Government, with a change in government. The left government played an instrumental role in constituting and nurturing Kudumbashree by providing monetary and logistics support. It is unpredictable that if the future governments with different ideologies continue or withdraw this supports to Kudumbashree. So, the question of how far Kudumbashree can function well as a self-reliant agency without governmental support remains unanswered.

4.8 Conclusion

As expected, this unique programme gained universal appreciation with its innovative idea of the formation of SHGs that encourage them to be active participants in local-level planning and development. However, some of its weaknesses like over politicization, cross borrowings, inefficiencies in managing micro-enterprises and lack of marketing skills are found to be hampering the effectiveness of the programme. Despite all these shortcomings, Kudumbashree Mission in Kerala has transformed the lives of its participants by improving their socio-economic and political status. Within the short span of its existence, the movement became a force to be reckoned with, especially in the political arena, with political parties queuing up for their loyalties. The effectiveness of the programme in bringing more women into active politics will be discussed in the upcoming chapters. Within a short period, the Kudumbashree mission has become an inevitable part of LSGIs. Their partnership in implementing various governmental programmes has proved to be very effective as they draw benefits from each other. Hence, the researcher believes the 'Kudumbashree' has a significant role in raising political consciousness among its members, and it inspires women to climb up the political ladder.

Chapter V

Data Analysis: A Comparison between Socio-Economic Backgrounds of Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree Groups

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was an attempt to introduce Kudumbashree's history, organizational structure and its major activities in the state. This movement has been identified as an innovative programme that empowers women holistically by scholars like John (2009), Williams et al., (2011), Thampi and Devika (2007), and Shihabudheen (2013) as it has touched the lives of many underprivileged women throughout Kerala in different ways. As per Kudumbashree mission's official site, as on March 31st 2019, it has 43,93,579 members and has a presence in all the 14 districts of Kerala. As discussed earlier, this study specifically investigates Kudumbashree's role in instilling political consciousness among women as it speculates and the extent to which the members are making use of the skills either newly picked up or mastered through Kudumbashree activities to survive in the field of politics. It also sheds light into the difficulties (if any) faced by those women who entered into politics without Kudumbashree exposure. This chapter mainly deals with the differences in the socio- economic backgrounds of the two sets of respondents. The first set of respondents are the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats who entered into politics through Kudumbashree whereas the second set is of members with no Kudumbashree experience prior to their political entry.

The universe of the study, Kottayam district in Kerala has 11 block panchayats with a total of 71 panchayats. The researcher randomly selected one panchayat from each block to carry out her study and interviewed all the elected women representatives in those panchayats. Thus, a total of 93 women elected representatives belonged to 11 different Panchayats were interviewed out of which 59 of them were with Kudumbashree background, and 34 of them were without Kudumbashree. While analysing data using SPSS, identification codes were given to each respondent; the codes R 1- R 59 were assigned to the first group and R 60 - R 93 to the second group. In addition to this, the researcher interviewed 54 Key Informants consisted mainly of elected male representatives, staff, Kudumbashree members and a few

political leaders in those selected areas. They were listed as KI (Key informant) 1 to 54. To protect the identity of the respondents, pseudonyms are used throughout this study while quoting their responses. For data collection, the researcher had travelled the length and breadth of Kottayam district and had multiple interactions with the selected respondents to know them personally and professionally, as it was found that one sitting with a duration of 45-60 minutes is not sufficient to unravel their stories.

Two sets of interview schedules were administered in this study out of which the first one was framed for those who had worked in the Kudumbashree mission for a reasonable time ahead of their representation in Gram Panchayats and the second set was for Non- Kudumbashree members who came into Panchayat level politics through other routes. Along with the interview schedule there employed a fact-finding information sheet in order to collect general information about each Panchayat selected for the study. Before finalizing the interview schedules, the researcher tested them in one of the selected Panchayats named Teekoy in February 2018 and made a few corrections accordingly. After the pilot study, the researcher started her panchayat visits in April 2018 and continued in the field until June 2018. In August, she spent two weeks in the field. In December 2018, she revisited the field for additional data collection and remained there till early January 2019. Later in April 2019, she visited the field to conduct follow-up sessions of her case studies and to organise focus group discussions (FGDs). This visit lasted until late June 2019. During her time in the field, the researcher conducted focus group discussions in six panchayats in which male members were also invited to participate. The number of participants was ranged from 10 to 15 in those FGDs. In panchayats like Teekoy, Parathod and Uzhavoor, the researcher conducted separate interactive sessions for women members where they were encouraged to open up without being interrupted by male representatives. In Panchayats like Puthupally, Meenachil and Paipad, the researcher welcomed Kudumbashree members for a group discussion to know if their expectations of women elected representatives from Kudumbashree in their panchayat had been met or not. The number of participants in such women-only sessions were ranged from 5 to 8 and lasted for 20 to 30 minutes.

After making initial contact through the phone to know the availability of women members, the researcher had met either Secretary or President of all the selected panchayats and

explained the purpose of her visit in detail. The researcher scheduled her first visit to panchayat on the day of committee meetings when all the elected members were supposed to be present. In every panchayat, after taking permission from either Secretary or President, the researcher had explained her purpose of visit to the committee and had an informal interaction with everyone present there. All the 93 respondents except one, were sworn in as elected representatives immediately after the election conducted on 11/5/2015. The sole exception was one of the members from Kallara Panchayat who had been elected after a byelection conducted in July 18th 2017. The researcher met each woman representative individually to fix a convenient time for a detailed case study interview with the help of the prepared interview schedule. The in-depth interviews lasted for 45 minutes to one hour on an average; though some respondents were eloquent storytellers and interviews with them lasted longer. Interestingly, women worked with Kudumbashree had a special knack to present their side of the story, as many of them have had participated in surveys, either as an informant or they themselves conducted surveys on behalf of Kudumbashree. The one-to-one interview explored different areas of their lives including how was their lives before becoming Kudumbashree/panchayat members, how did they fare on their jobs as Panchayat members, whether those who came through Kudumbashree have any kind of advantages over others, what kind of exposures do they get once they become members of this organisation and how does it help them to manage panchayat, and finally if this exposure inspires them to climb up the political ladder further.

The interview with Kudumbashree members specifically focussed freedom of respondents to exercise their agency in socio-political arenas of their lives while they were growing up to know if they had experienced any constraints to exercise their agency back then, if there were constraints how did Kudumbashree help them to overcome those, and if Kudumbashree inspired her to try her luck in the political field, and finally what changes did the election bring into their lives. On the other hand, the interview with the other group concentrated on different aspects of their lives before entering into the political field, their or their family's political connection with influential political leaders, if they had faced any challenges during the initial phase, their personal experiences after becoming leaders, and their opinion on women members with Kudumbashree background. The respondents were encouraged to share their own experiences and stories freely, and they happily did so. During the data collection, the

researcher had attended different programmes conducted by both Kudumbashree units and village panchayats in all selected areas such as Jagratholsavam 2018 conducted by Karukachal Gram Panchayat on 5/5/2018 and a training class they conducted for Kudumbashree members to teach them handicraft skills, ‘Oorukoottam’ conducted by Teekoy Panchayat on 5/18/2018 (special Gram Sabha of people belonged to scheduled tribes in the panchayat to discuss their development issues), health awareness campaign conducted by mobile health care unit in Elikkulam Panchayat on 5/25/2018 and Jagratholsamvam conducted by Teekoy Panchayat to spread awareness about the measures to keep the panchayat free from communicable diseases during monsoon season on 5/8/2019.

5.2 More about Selected Panchayats

As mentioned earlier in the introduction chapter Kottayam district is home to Kerala’s 1,974,551 persons of which 1,006,262 are females with a positive sex ratio (Census 2011). Obviously, people in this district are not biased against girl children, or the tendency to do female foeticide is not reported in this area. Another positive factor about this district is the basic literacy rate stands at a whopping 97.21%. Women here enjoy comparatively better social status and standard of living than their counterparts elsewhere. In all selected Panchayats, the researcher interacted not only with women members but with their male counterparts and staff also. As the Kudumbashree mission is an integral part of this research, the researcher visited its unit offices and interacted with them to know more about their major activities in the respective Panchayats. Based on these interactions done with the help of a fact-finding information sheet, a brief introduction on each panchayat has been given below; it must be noted that in all the panchayats Aganawadis (playschools under Panchayat) and public distribution system including fair price shops, *Neethi stores and Maveli stores are said to be functioning well.

**Neethi and Maveli Stores; Initiatives of Kerala Government to sell consumer products at lower rates*

Table 5.1 Basic Information about Selected Panchayats

Name of Panchayat	Block	Total Population	No. of Females	No. of Electoral wards	Total Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
Elikkulam	Pampady	22,178	11,027	16	97%	95%
Kallara	Kaduthuruthy	13,142	6,526	13	94%	90%
Karukachal	Vazhoor	20,133	10,088	16	97%	96%
Meenachil	Lalam	16,054	7,957	13	97%	96%
Neendoor	Ettumanoor	20,289	10,092	15	95%	93%
Paipadu	Madappally	21,781	10,989	16	98%	98%
Parathode	Kanjirapally	27,836	13,823	19	95%	94%
Puthupally	Pallam	27,701	14,104	18	97%	96%
Teekoy	Erattupetta	10,272	5,145	13	95%	93%
T.V Puram	Vaikom	18,857	9,226	14	92%	89%
Uzhavoor	Uzhavoor	15,338	7,557	13	95%	94%

Source; Census Data 2001 available in <http://lsgkerala.gov.in/> accessed on 12/12/2019 11.49 pm

5.2.1 Elikkulam

Out of 16 wards in this Panchayat, nine are governed by women. The President and the chairpersons of two standing committees were women at the time of data collection. According to the panchayat Vice. President, Elikkulam is primarily an agrarian village where a significant number of people are engaged in rubber plantations. Only a few people are engaged in the cultivation of food crops. Therefore, he said Panchayat has been bringing forth some innovative projects to promote organic farming in its third and fourth wards. As this Panchayat does not have any drinking water projects under Kerala water authority, the people of this area face severe drinking water crisis during summer. He maintained that “Vanitha Jagratha Samithees” constituted by the panchayat have been working exceptionally well to make sure the safety and security of women in their area.

5.2.2 Kallara

The President and the head of two standing committees were women during the period of data collection. According to the President, some places in its interior part have poor road connectivity and issues with drinking water supply. The CDS Chairperson of the Kudumbashree mission pointed out that except one all other women elected representatives are from Kudumbashree as the panchayat has a strong follower base for the mission.

5.2.3 Karukachal

According to the Primary contact- one of the staff in the administration, it is one of the fastest-growing small towns in the Vazhoor block of Kottayam district. This panchayat is considered as an ideal place to set up small to medium scale enterprises because of its geographical proximity and road accessibility to all major parts of the district. There are 16 wards and eight women members, out of which six are from Kudumbashree. Obviously, Kudumbashree has been functioning very well here, and it played an important role in recruiting some of the active ward members.

5.2.4 Meenachil

This panchayat comes under Lalam block panchayat and has 13 electoral wards in total. It has eight women members and claimed they have completely resolved issues with drinking water in many areas and have been doing their best to complete the rest of the welfare projects as planned. Kudumbashree units in the Panchayat have been functioning well, and they are successfully running a hotel in front of the Panchayat as well.

5.2.5 Neendoor

A village, once known for its long paddy fields resembling Kuttanadu, is completely moved away from paddy cultivation now as it is not profitable any more considering higher labour charges, declining prices and difficulty in getting labourers, pointed out one of the members while talking about the general condition of the Panchayat. However, many people grow cash crops like rubber and pepper. In most of the families, there will be expatriates who live in either gulf countries or in western countries to support them financially. This panchayat has 15 panchayat wards in total with eight women members.

5.2.6 Paippad

The people here are majorly engaged in agricultural activities. According to the information given in lgskerala.in, 1323 hectors of this panchayat have been used for cultivating paddy, and the rest has been used for cultivating coconut, rubber, pepper and other food crops. Though this panchayat has not been hosting any large-scale industries, some small-scale enterprises like curry powder, book, steel, brick making units are operating from here. Out of nine women ward members in this panchayat, eight have entered into politics through Kudumbashree.

5.2.7 Parathod

This Panchayat is covered with hectors of rubber and pepper plantations. The Panchayat has curvy and steep roads through the rubber plantations, and most of them are found to be in good condition. Women members in this Panchayat pointed out that, their area has several educational institutions and health care centres in both the public and private sector. Out of 19 wards, ten are managed by women. Kudumbashree unit is said to be functioning very well under the guidance of the current panchayat president as she is also a product of Kudumbashree.

5.2.8 Puthupally

This panchayat has 18 electoral wards in total, out of which ten are managed by women members and has a well-functioning Kudumbashree unit. Like most of the panchayats in Kottayam districts, this panchayat also has acres of rubber plantations, and it houses the campus of Rubber board.

5.2.9 T. V Puram

Being covered with ‘Vempanattu Kayal’, the largest lake in Kerala and the longest lake in India on three of its sides, this Panchayat has unique geographical features and culture, different from all other panchayats selected for this study. A good percentage of villagers have been involved in hand weaving also. Coconut and palm tree plantations are a regular sight on the banks of the lake. Canoe rides through the narrow canals attract tourists from all over the world. Of the 14 ward members, nine are women, and seven of them have worked in Kudumbashree before becoming active in politics.

5.2.10 Teekoy

Its unique geographical features and scenic beauty attracts people from all over the world. It has steep mountains ideal for hiking which is 3000 feet above from the sea level like Illikkakkal and Vagamon. Panchayat president proudly stated that the recently built roads connecting all major tourist attractions in the Panchayat are bringing more tourists into this beautiful picturesque village. It has 13 panchayat wards and seven women ward members.

5.2.11 Uzhavoor

Uzhavoor, the village in which the tenth President of India K.R Narayanan was born and brought up, is one of the major towns in Kottayam District. He was, the first Malayali and a Dalit to become the President. He belonged to a low-income family and is still an inspiration to the youth here. The panchayat has 13 electoral wards in total with eight women members. The table below shows the panchayat wise number of women members with and without Kudumbashree background in the total sample, in the alphabetic order of panchayats selected.

Table 5.2 No. of Kudumbashree Vs No. of Non-Kudumbashree in the Total Sample

Panchayat	Number of members with Kudumbashree	Number of members without Kudumbashree
Elikkulam*	3	6
Kallara	6	1
Karukachal	6	2
Meenachil*	4	4
Neendoor	6	2
Paippadu	8	1
Parathod*	6	4
Puthupally*	6	4
T.V Puram	7	2
Teekoy*	3	4
Uzhavoor*	4	4
Total	59	34

Source; fieldwork data

Table 5.2 illustrates that out of two sets of respondents, members with Kudumbashree exposure clearly outnumbered members without Kudumbashree exposure. This itself can be considered as a massive achievement of Kudumbashree initiative. During the earlier days of reservation, many people believed that filling up all those seats reserved for women would be an impossible task. However, this myth has been successfully broken in the first panchayat level election itself which was held in Karnataka in December 1993 wherein women won 43.4% of total seats, marking more than 10% increment than the stipulated 33% (Mohanty, 1995). On the contrary, one of the key-informants from TV Puram pointed out that when the number of seats kept aside for women raised from previous 33 to 50%**, finding the right candidates in every ward became a formidable challenge for political parties. After identifying a potential candidate, the party leaders had to approach and gain the confidence of her family first. Not only that, in many cases they had to offer some undertakings to their male guardians like women members will not be asked to go out during unusual timings, but the party also will not trouble them with other party responsibilities and the like. Highlighting Kudumbashree's role in bringing women into politics, he candidly elucidated, *"Kudumbashree women are always ready to come out of their shells and to mingle easily with the common public. Moreover, earlier, it was hard to convince an ordinary woman without much political connection in order to contest in an election unless her husband is an active party worker. In other words, Kudumbashree made our hunt for right candidates much easier"* (Bastian, Key-Informant). However, this observation stands true only for the amount of 'effort' a party leader has to put into convincing a woman to become a candidate as it is noted that, for a Kudumbashree woman and her family, the decision to contest evolves with a lesser effort by party members. Since the researcher met a reasonable number of respondents who contested in non-reserved seats, the total percentage of them would surely be greater than the targeted 50%. Table 5.2 given above shows that, out of 93 respondents, 63.44 % of members have associated themselves with Kudumbashree before becoming ward representatives. In Panchayats like Paippadu and Kallara all women members except one had Kudumbashree background.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in these Panchayats. In addition to the FGDs with elected representatives, another with either Kudumbashree members or with women elected representatives alone also conducted in Teekoy, Puthupally, Parathode, Meenachil. The number of participants varied from 10 to 15, including the researcher in FGDs with both male and female elected members. The number of participants in those FGDs with either women members or Kudumbashree members ranged from 5 to 8*

***"Kerala Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act 2009" and "Kerala Municipality (Amendment) Act" are ineffect since 2010 civic polls which increased their reservation cap up to a 50% in local bodies.*

5.3 Socio-economic Background of the Respondents

This section exclusively deals with the socio-economic background of the respondents. Based on Naila Kabeer's (1999a) definition of empowerment highlighted in the literature review, it is clear that only those who experienced disempowerment or lack of choices in their lives are entitled to be empowered. To know the extent of empowerment they are experiencing currently, it is important to assess the level of disempowerment they may have experienced previously (before entering into public sphere either as Kudumbashree members or as politicians). Therefore, this section checks, if any of the respondents experienced disempowerment or lack of choices in their lives, especially during their growing up years due to theirs or their family's socio-economic conditions. Some of the factors examined here are respondents' age, education, religion, caste, occupation, marital status and family type. This section also compares the differences between the socio-economic conditions of the two sets of respondents to verify if any one group has the edge over the other either to kick start their political career or to survive in this field.

Table 5.3 Age-wise Distribution

Age (in years)	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
21-30	1	1.7	2	5.9
31-40	11	18.6	4	11.8
41-50	30	50.8	10	29.4
51-60	14	23.7	14	41.2
61 +	3	5.1	4	11.8
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

For a woman, her 'age' is an important factor as it has the potential to act either as an enabling or as a disabling factor. After reviewing many studies in states like Orissa, West Bengal and Maharashtra Mohanty (1995) noted the following points 1) persuading younger women to contest in an election is much easier, 2) women of childbearing age are entering into this field in bulk numbers despite having domestic responsibilities. However, the present study reveals an entirely different trend which is in tally with the global trend highlighted in an Inter-Parliamentary Union report published in 2016- 'Youth participation in National Parliaments 2016'-wherein they found youngsters are severely underrepresented in the national parliaments. According to this study, the percentage of Member of Parliaments below 30 years of age in world parliaments is as small as 1.9% and the same below 40 years of age is just 26%. In this study, irrespective of their Kudumbashree background, there were just three respondents below 30 years of age. In the total sample itself, there were only 18 women below 40 years of age, which is equal to 19.3%.

Excerpts from the interview with a young mother who was feeling guilty of leaving behind her young daughters to go to Panchayat explains the reason for the rarity of young mothers in this field, *"Many people around look down on me saying that I am just a ward member, not a Prime minister. In fact, the last three years have been a nightmare as I get very little or no time to help my daughters in their studies and their personal matters"* (Maneesha, Non-Kudumbashree group). Their job as ward members may sound silly for some people around them, but it requires them to be on alert round the clock. The noticeable lower percentage of women panchayat members under 40 years is a clear indication of young mothers' preference to stay away from political glare unless they have a reliable support system to take care of their young children at home.

However, the sole unmarried respondent under this category had another story to tell. She fought in the election as a 22-year-old girl immediately after started working in a private firm. She had to leave her job and took over her mother's place as the latter got a part-time government job. For her, the toughest part was to establish herself as a strong/serious contender for the post. Her challenges did not end there as the majority of her colleagues refused to take her 'seriously'. For them, she was still a college-going girl and a misfit among well-established politicians who have been adorning different positions of power for long. According to her, the first three months of

her tenure was her toughest period as she did not know how to interact with her senior colleagues. From this, it is evident that people tend to brand young as inexperienced and ill-informed, especially in matters related to politics. They tend to forget that youngsters are more flexible and quick learners. Moreover, they adapt to any situations with ease. It's been a while since her election into Panchayat, but she continues to fight those 'tags' attributed to her by her senior colleagues like 'immature' and 'too young' for politics.

Older women, who were 60 plus years, with grown-up children reported that their increasing physical ailments prevented them from reaching every nook and corner of their wards. Therefore, it is apparent that the respondents belonging to the category of 41 to 50 years would be the ones who could contribute maximum to the society as they have lesser domestic responsibilities and in better health. Under this age category, while Kudumbashree contributes 30 (50.85%) of its young and vibrant members to different Panchayats, the latter category sends only ten (29.41%). The table 5.3 depicts that, 44 out of 59 women members with Kudumbashree background, fell under 'above 41 and below 60 years' category, which means 74.58 % of them were middle-aged, the age group perceived as the best time for women to be active in socio-political arena of the society as their children are probably away from home for higher education or job. This observation stands true for the second category also, although it slightly fell below the former group; women with Kudumbashree background. However, 70.59% is still a good percentage, emphasising women's general tendency to be politically more active during their middle age up to late '50s. A respondent under this category viewed this as an opportunity to see off her boredom after her children moved out, *"I am seeing this as an opportunity to fill in my empty nest with people in need. I always want to do social service. Now that I got this opportunity, and I am happily doing my bit to help the poor and marginalised, and I am not expecting anything in return"* (Kuttiyamma, Non-Kudumbashree group).

Table 5.4 Religious Composition of the Respondents:

<i>Religion</i>	<i>With Kudumbashree</i>		<i>Without Kudumbashree</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Christian</i>	23	39.0	23	67.6
<i>Hindu</i>	35	59.3	10	29.4
<i>Muslim</i>	1	1.7	1	2.9
<i>Total</i>	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

As mentioned in the first chapter, Kottayam district is home to 49.81% of Hindus, 43.48% of Christians and 6.41% of Muslims based on the 2011 census. Out of 93 respondents interviewed, there were only two Muslim ward members, one each in both groups. Primarily, compared to the other two religions, the Muslim population in this district is too low, so does their political representation. In addition to this, some religious groups, including Muslims, generally prefer to keep their women away from the public sphere due to various reasons. Though educated ones in such religions oppose such practices and encourage their women to take part in political activities as well, the data in the above table clearly states there is a considerable shortage of Muslim women representation in Gram Panchayats selected for this study.

Table 5.5 Caste of Respondents

Social Category	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
General	27	45.8	29	85.3
SC/ST/OBC	31	52.5	5	14.7
No Caste	1	1.7	0	0.0
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

The table above (5.5) demonstrates that women belong to SC/ST/OBC groups without Kudumbashree occupied only five seats out of a possible 34 seats, which comes around 14%. On the contrary, Kudumbashree group consisted of 52.5% SC/ST/OBC women. Rest of the seats were with the traditional elites of Kerala society like Nairs and Syrian Christians. Unlike traditional Nairs who followed matrilineal customs, the Syrian Christians were patrilineal and constituted 16% of the total population in 1968 (Nossiter, 1982). Though the latter community is actively involved in business and service sector jobs, their affinity towards the rubber and spice plantation sectors is well known. Their concentration in central districts of Kerala including Kottayam where this study was carried out, made them a strong political force there. Nairs who were one step below Namboodiri Brahmins in traditional caste hierarchy of Kerala gradually moved away from their matrilineal customs and adopted patrilineal traditions. At present, Nairs through their organization known as Nair Service Society (NSS) act as a political pressure group and enjoy a prominent place in power echelons.

Out of 93 respondents only one woman who has been there with Kudumbashree mission from its very beginning proudly said, *“I am casteless, and I am bringing up my children as casteless”* (Binu, Kudumbashree group). However, the researcher found no significant evidence to connect this statement of hers with her Kudumbashree background. Further conversation pointed out that it could have been stemmed from the fact that she is married into a family which is different from her own caste. Now that she is just 44 and her children are school going, she might have thought it is progressive and fashionable to think beyond caste lines. However, when the time comes to avail ‘reservation’ benefits for lower castes in the field of higher education or jobs majority of those who say so, are seen running around to collect their caste certificate to claim such reservations. Either way, the fact remains that she vociferously opposes caste system as of now and if her anti-caste stand comes from her Kudumbashree background it is, in fact, praiseworthy, and hopefully, soon our country will wake up to a day when everyone starts thinking beyond caste lines.

During interviews, many respondents have expressed their concerns over raising ‘caste division’ in our society nowadays. Knowingly or unknowingly political parties also contribute to its growth by proposing candidates of a particular caste based on their composition within the

constituency. Therefore, many deserving candidates who genuinely wanted to enter into this field had been denied of candidature based on their religion or caste.

Table 5.6 Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Education	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Highschool	24	40.7	4	11.8
Intermediate	19	32.2	10	29.4
Graduate	15	25.4	18	52.9
Post graduate	1	1.7	2	5.9
Total	59	100	34	100

Source; fieldwork data

Though education has an important role in determining one's capability to exercise his/her agency and is identified "*as one of the best ways to resist the oppression and to organise politically*" (Sen and Dreze, 1995:15), it cannot be considered as a prerequisite for entering into politics as many of the older women who discontinued their formal education due to different circumstances have strong willingness to engage in social service. At the grass-root level, one's educational qualification alone does not determine his/her growth in politics, but factors like a person's innate capabilities, social visibility, determination, hard work and the like also matter to a great extent. For women, who do not hold higher degrees, Kudumbashree offers a second chance to catch their lost dreams back by providing them various income sources and opportunities to be active in society. The following response of a woman with Kudumbashree revealed the very opinion stated above, "*previously I had a lot of insecurities and frustrations as I couldn't study beyond 10th standard. This feeling acted as a disabling factor all through my daily life. However, after joining with Kudumbashree, I started learning many new things and finally overcame my inferiority complex to a certain extent*" (Ancita, Kudumbashree group).

If empowerment is, "*a journey from silence to articulation, from invisibility to recognition and from isolation to organisation*" as proposed by Lazao (1995:34), any means that encourage women to undertake such a journey must be considered as a source of empowerment. Therefore,

it is evident that participation in microfinance self-help groups is also a source of empowerment, just as education. In Kerala's case, one could hardly meet a person who cannot read or write at least Malayalam, the local language. Table 5.6, reveals that all respondents have high school education or more. While the group without Kudumbashree experience stood with a substantial number of well-educated women with 20 among the total 34 (58.82%); either graduates or postgraduates, 72.9% of the Kudumbashree group stayed below that level of education. Interestingly, out of those 20 highly educated women from Non-Kudumbashree group, 40% of them were stay-at-home mothers before their political entry. At the same time out of 16 highly educated members from Kudumbashree, only 25% were homemakers. Remaining 75% was leading an active social life even before entering into politics. From table 5.6, it is evident that Kudumbashree opens the way even for women with a basic level of education into politics. The very fact has been pointed out by some respondents who belong to the privileged class of the society as a negative effect of the Kudumbashree mission. However, an ardent supporter of Kudumbashree mission who is a male member pointed out that *"After all, information dissemination is one of the major responsibilities of ward members... anyone with basic literacy could do it without much trouble. The only thing that matters is their willingness... those who come through Kudumbashree have been exceptionally well with communication"* (Siju.P, Key Informant).

Table 5.7 Occupation of respondents

Occupation	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Employed	20	33.9	13	38.2
Home maker	24	40.7	16	47.1
Self-employed	15	25.4	5	14.7
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

While the second group housed the maximum number of educated women and 47.1% of homemakers, the first group had the minimum number of homemakers, indicating that respondents with Kudumbashree background were more active in society even if they were the ones without high education. Out of those 20 employed in the first group, 4 of them were Asha workers (those who work as health activists in the community as part of National Rural Health mission with honorarium under Panchayat), and one has been working under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) for a while. Asha workers were familiar with every nook and corner of the Panchayat and they believed this also came in handy when they became members in addition to their Kudumbashree experience.

Within the ‘employed group’, there was a respondent with Kudumbashree background who has been in the Director Board of a Co-operative Bank for ten years. Though she became a Kudumbashree member much later, she acknowledged the role of Kudumbashree in imparting confidence to face the election for the very first time in her life as she was inducted into the bank board without a direct election. As per table 5.7, the first group has a more significant number of self-employed women. Obviously becoming a Kudumbashree member sounds equivalent to becoming a small-scale entrepreneur.

Table 5.8 Family Type of Respondents

Type of family	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Joint	26	44.1	19	55.9
Nuclear	26	44.1	13	38.2
Single parent	7	11.9	2	5.9
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

According to the table above, the percentage of respondents from the joint* family 48.39% slightly exceeded that of the nuclear family 41.94% in the total sample (93). As discussed earlier, this confirms the argument that supports women's tendency to be active in the political sphere if they have a supportive family at home. Taking care of younger children is not a problem in a joint family set up where in-laws cohabit with husband and wife. However, in the case of older respondents, having aged parents at home who require assistance, act as a deterrent that cut short their political dream. From the responses of women belonging to different age groups, it is evident that they all are expected to carry out their routine household works no matter what, in addition to their Panchayat duties. On a brighter note, most of the single mothers in both groups say their busy schedule has been helping them to overcome stigmas and challenges associated with single parenting. There were nine single mothers in the total sample out of which seven were from Kudumbashree group. For most of them, leading an active political life is so comforting that they no longer feel loneliness as they get little or no time to think anything else apart from issues related to Panchayat.

To quote one of such experiences shared during the interview, *"when I lost my husband a few years ago, I preferred to lead a quiet life unlike he was around. But Kudumbashree colleagues supported me to return to normal life by posting me as the secretary of the group... When the Panchayat election announced, they were the ones who encouraged me to contest in the election believing it would heal my wound further if I am engaged 24/7 with duties of a panchayat member"* (Moni, Kudumbashree group).

Table 5.9 Economic Status of the Family

Economic Status	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Below Poverty Line (BPL)	26	44.1	2	5.9
Above Poverty Line (APL)	33	55.9	32	94.1
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

*here joint family implies mother -in-law/ father in law or both lives with their offspring's family

From this table above, it is evident that with or without Kudumbashree, candidates belonging to APL had a strong position here as they constitute 69.89% of the total sample. When it comes to BPL respondents, 26 out of 28 respondents (92.86%) were members of Kudumbashree. Without Kudumbashree, just two BPL women made it through. This is an example of how Kudumbashree, a programme originally started for the poor women through collectivizing their potentials has been helping them to make their presence felt in the political sphere also. However, whether they fared well or not in their duties compared to women representatives without Kudumbashree background, will be evaluated in the next chapter.

5.4 Source of Income

As shown in Table 5.9, respondents from APL families constituted 69.89% of the total sample. It must be noted that 59.3% from Kudumbashree group said they were financially independent before entering into Politics, out of which 50.8% had been earning below Rs. 10,000/- (Ten thousand) monthly. There were just five respondents who were earning above Rs.10,000/- (Ten thousand) but below Rs.20,000/- (Twenty thousand) in this group. Rest of them, i.e., 40.7% were financially dependent on their spouses previously. As pointed out earlier, compared to the Non-Kudumbashree group, this group has respondents with less education and has been engaged in informal sector jobs earning a meagre monthly income.

Under this category, 25.4% of the respondents were self-employed previously. Most of them were running small scale businesses like tailoring units, tea shops, soap manufacturing, organic farming and the like with loans availed from their respective Kudumbashree units. In the case of Non-Kudumbashree group, out of 34 respondents, precisely 50% of them said they were financially independent before entering into politics, with 58.82% of them earning between Rs.10,001- 20,000/- (Ten thousand and one - Twenty thousand) and 11.76% earning above Rs.20,001/- (Twenty thousand and one) and the rest were earning less than ten thousand per month. If one is to take the case of financially dependent respondents from the total sample, 41 out of 93 (44.1%) respondents said, they were financially dependent on their spouses. Those respondents then asked about if their financial dependency had been affected their psychological wellbeing, with the help of a few statements. The table below shows that 27 respondents from Kudumbashree group and 17 from the Non-Kudumbashree group were worried that they were not contributing enough towards the family's income.

Table 5.10 Psychological Effects of Financial Dependency

Statements	I used to feel 'ashamed' of my inability to contribute substantially towards family expenses				I refrained from buying personal goods				I had lesser role in family's decision making			
Response	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree		With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree		With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0	1	5.9	0	0	1	5.9	0	0	1	5.9
Disagree	6	22.2	11	64.7	6	22.2	11	64.7	13	48.1	11	64.7
No Opinion	2	7.4	1	5.9	2	7.4	0	0	2	7.4	0	0
Agree	9	33.3	3	17.6	9	33.3	4	23.5	10	37.0	3	17.6
Strongly Agree	10	37.0	1	5.9	10	37.0	1	5.9	2	7.4	2	11.8
Total	27	100.0	17	100	27	100.0	17.0	100.0	27	100.0	17	100.0

Source; fieldwork data; From optimistic Strongly Disagree to pessimistic Strongly Agree the options were given in a five-point scale.

From the above table, it is found that 70.3% of the women who have joined Kudumbashree later, used to feel ashamed of their financial dependency and refrained from spending money on their personal needs. Apparently, whenever family faces resource crunch women themselves would readily sacrifice their personal needs and suffer silently, especially if they are not supplementing family's income. Being part of Kudumbashree, they are all financially independent to a certain extent now, compared to the olden days when they had absolutely no source for additional income, apart from depending on 'vattipalisha' (a Malayalam term for taking a loan from individuals who charge high-interest rate). In the words of a respondent, "*we don't have to depend on 'vattipalisha annachi (a term to address a person who lends money for daily interest) any more as we have muttathoru bank (a bank of our own in our back yard implies Kudumbashree's loan lending facility) now*" (Surekha, Kudumbashree group).

However, it does not mean that they are earning a huge income now as part of Kudumbashree. The point is, they enjoy a sense of relief as they have an alternative to arrange finance as and when needed. Many studies have shown that 'being financially independent' improves one's confidence and self-esteem to a great extent. However small that amount may be, the thought itself has the power to enhance one's decision-making ability in the family. This was evident in the responses from the respondents belonged to the Kudumbashree group. Throughout the interviews many of them had exhibited a sense of pride as they were doing the best of their

abilities to supplement their family's income, considering the meagre exposures they have had during their growing up years.

At the same time, more than 70 % of the financially dependent women who were not part of Kudumbashree, believed that their lack of income had no impact on their decision- making abilities in the family. Interestingly, one among them disagreed strongly with all those statements confidently, that she and her husband have equal 'say' in all the family matters. As discussed earlier, this group included a greater number of highly educated and stay-at-home mothers from affluent families who said they do not have to worry about financial aspects of the family as their spouses usually take care of such things. Propagating the traditional patriarchal views on husband's role in families most of them said, they do not feel ashamed of asking anything from their husbands as they believe their duty is to take care of family affairs while their spouses busy making money outside the home. Interestingly, they never felt their decisions were being disregarded as long as they keep the 'boundaries' intact. To quote one such response from many, *"Don't we all know where to draw lines? No one from good families would make bad decisions that affect their family's social reputation. We are all brought up in such a way that, we recognize and respect those boundaries even if no one asked us to do so"* (Bibi, Non-Kudumbashree group). This response vividly states that the subordinate status of the women is so normalized in this society as pointed out in the review of literature, even women themselves feel nothing wrong about it, and they do not shy away from stating it loud and clear. However, around 44 % of the women from Kudumbashree group and 29.4% of Non-Kudumbashree group felt, they had a lesser role in decision making with respect to certain family affairs and believed it could be because of their financial dependency prior to their entry into public space.

Table 5.11 If the Respondent was Elected from a Reserved Seat

Reserved	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	89.8	32	94.1
No	6	10.2	2	5.9
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

With 50% up for grabs in every Panchayat, women have either equalled or outnumbered men. Obviously, men interviewees were not happy about it. A conversation with a male member pointed out precisely this, *“when they (women) were given 33%, we felt it was a great initiative even though they had no basic knowledge about the functioning of Panchayat... Now men are lesser in number and are forced to do extra work to overcome the problems which they have created due to their inexperience in the field”* (Chacko.J, Key Informant). Here, the notion is that women should feel happy and content with whatever they are being offered without asking ‘rightful’ share. Moreover, they associate political ignorance with women so easily, ignoring the fact that many men too become politicians without “eligibility” or “merit”. In fact, the male respondent believed all women members were good for nothing, and the panchayat would have collapsed if men members had not been stepped up their game by investing more energy and time to compensate for ignorant women’s mistakes. Women’s perspective on this matter, is also not very different and the following excerpt from an interview confirms the same, *“this (50% reservation) itself is great, there is no need for a woman to contest in a general seat unless she has been told to do so by the party”* (Sini, Kudumbashree group). The table above clearly indicates that the number of women contesting in general seats is not so great either. Still, there is a reality that Kudumbashree could be proud of, out of eight respondents who contested in general seats six were members of Kudumbashree mission.

Table 5.12 Current Position in the Panchayat

Position	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Ward member	56	94.9	25	73.5
Vice president	2	3.4	3	8.8
President	1	1.7	6	17.6
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data as on May 2018

All the respondents except one have been adorning their current positions in their respective Panchayats since November 2015. The exception was, the youngest of all respondents, from Kallara Panchayat who replaced her mother in a by-election conducted in July 18th 2017. The Panchayat elections can be so fascinating sometimes as it stages many strange political ‘alliances’ based on certain understandings among parties. They divide positions of power within their allies after many hours of deliberations. Sometimes, they allocate the presidency to one party for the first 2 or 3 years and let their allies to keep the vice presidency. Then reverse it for the rest of the term. In one of the selected Panchayats when the seat strength became equal between the two rival parties, the third party which had two seats refused to support either of them during the trust vote, and then the ruling party had been chosen by lucky draw. Such situations are vulnerable to political chaos and instability. As a result, noisy committees have become a regular practice in this panchayat.

There are four standing committees in all Panchayats. The Vice President would be the de jure head of the financial standing committee, rest of the standing committees are development, welfare, health and education. When it comes to the standing committee chairmanship, the ruling party and their alliance divide those positions amongst them based on pre-poll or post-poll agreement. From table 5.12, it is evident that, while 26.47 % of respondents without Kudumbashree who generally came from financially stable and politically well-connected families possessed vital leadership positions, while the other group had just 5.08% of respondents with leadership positions. However, 19 respondents with Kudumbashree experience have been working as standing committee chairpersons against Non-Kudumbashree group’s 10. In the case of health and education standing committee chairmanship, Kudumbashree members were preferred over others. When asked about this one member with Kudumbashree experience, candidly said, *“if it’s us we will walk around the ward without complaining. In addition to that, we have better connections all around the panchayat ...for health surveys or awareness classes, we make use of the Kudumbashree network.”* (Vineetha, Kudumbashree group).

Table 5:13 Is it your First Term as a Member

Response	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	48	81.4	19	55.9
No	11	18.6	15	44.1
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

From the table above, it is clear that Kudumbashree had brought in 81.4% fresh faces to the political sphere in the last Panchayat election while Non-Kudumbashree inducted just 55.9% fresh faces. Only 11 (18.6%) respondents from Kudumbashree group had previous experience with local governance as the current term is their second or third. In the Non- Kudumbashree group, out of 44.1% who said it was not their first term, 33.33% had been elected three or more times including the current term. Questions such as did the freshers introduced by the Kudumbashree fared better than others?, did they have any advantages over others? will be answered in the next chapter.

Table 5.14 Individual, Social and Political Aspects Before Joining Politics

Statements	With Kudumbashree					Total	Without Kudumbashree				
	SD	D	NO	A	SA		SD	D	NO	A	SA
I turned down many opportunities to build up a career	6.8	52.5	1.7	16.9	22	100	8.8	70.6	0	8.8	11.8
Later I regretted for not utilizing them	6.8	54.2	1.7	20.3	16.9	100	8.8	70.6	0	8.8	11.8
I did have reservations on expressing my social and political views	10.2	39	0	39	11.9	100	11.8	47.1	0	26.5	14.7
I have been restricted from expressing my socio political views	10.2	44.1	1.7	33.9	10.2	100	11.8	55.9	0	23.5	8.8
Though I had freedom I preferred to go along with family's choice for voting	10.2	25.4	0	35.6	28.8	100	2.9	5.9	0	55.9	35.3
I had limited access to social clubs/organisation	10.2	32.2	0	37.3	20.3	100	11.8	26.5	0	32.4	29.4
I rarely attended political gatherings	22	15.3	0	23.7	39	100	17.6	14.7	0	5.9	61.8
I never visited pvt offices unaccompanied	33.6	33.6	0	5.1	23.4	100	5.9	23.5	0	2.9	67.6
I never attended Gram Sabha meetings as a commoner	33.9	25.4	0	20.3	20.3	100	14.7	8.8	0	8.8	67.6

Source; fieldwork data; From optimistic Strongly Disagree to pessimistic Strongly Agree the options were given on a five-point scale

The table above with nine statements is intended to help the researcher to analyse individual, social, and political aspects of the respondents previous to their active life in the public domain. For an individual, the extent of freedom to express himself/herself during growing up years shapes up his/her personality later in life. It also reflects in all of her/his views, including his/her political choices. These statements also check how far women, in these selected panchayats experience “learned helplessness” that compels women to conform to age-old stereotypes believing it is impossible to modify their environment or personal circumstances and decides to forgo all the opportunities to improve their situation (Stromquist,1995). For most of the women, who grow up in a highly patriarchal society as subordinates, political involvement never goes beyond “voting”. They follow their family’s political views generally and have never been encouraged to think differently. According to the table above, around 60% from Kudumbashree group and a whopping 80% from the other group had never turned down an opportunity to build up a political career previously implies the rarity of such opportunities back then (before PRI Act). They never thought a day like this would ever come as they had never been active in the public domain and moreover, no one from their social circle expected them to be politicians. Predominantly, they believed politics was for powerful 'men' and therefore never looked for political 'opportunities' until it is reserved for them. In addition to that, they never felt it as a necessity. It must be noted that almost the same percentage of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the second statement indicating that even if they had to forgo such opportunities, they would have never regretted it. At the same time, in the case of respondents who agreed with the first two statements, there is almost a 20% of the gap between Kudumbashree group and Non-Kudumbashree group, indicating former groups’ tendency to *“move away from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to developing a critical perspective on it”* which is an essential step towards empowerment (Kabeer 1999a:441). In other words, their exposure to Kudumbashree when it happened much later in their lives may have helped them to unlearn certain *“learned helplessness”* (Stromquist 1995:14) by developing a “critical consciousness” that enabled them to recognise what was wrong with their previous lives, invoking “regrets” about all those missed opportunities now.

The next two statements are to analyse if their family members had restricted them from expressing their social or political views. Sometimes, such restrictions could be self-imposed as well, arising from their inherent submissive attitude known as *“blissful ignorance”*

(Lazao,1995:27) in which women do not even realise they are being oppressed in the absence of overt physical coercion. Since birth, they have been trained to go with the flow of obeying the rules of the house. The thought of going against it may never occur to them. According to the table above, 50.9 % from the Kudumbashree group either *"agreed or strongly agreed"* that they had restrictions on expressing their socio-political views against Non- Kudumbashree groups' 41.2 %, as they know expressing different 'views' may hurt their family members' sentiments. It must be noted that for the next statement "though I had the freedom I preferred to go along with family's political choice'', 64.4% from Kudumbashree and a sizeable majority of 91.2% from Non-Kudumbashree group had nodded in favour. However, the 26.6% gap between two sets of the respondents, implies women belonged to privileged class tend to be more submissive and propagates patriarchal values than ordinary women who were less educated. The case is not very different for the next four statements also. If one is to consider, both sets of respondents together, a good majority of them said they had only limited access to social or political clubs, and they rarely attended any political gatherings before entering to politics officially. However, in the case of Non- Kudumbashree members, the percentage of women who *"agreed or strongly agreed"* for all the statements that analyse the extent of their political exposure before entering to politics turned out to be bigger than that of the other group. Therefore, we could say that the women belonged to Non-Kudumbashree group had lesser socio-political exposure and a substantial percentage of them means 67.6 % had neither visited government offices unaccompanied nor attended Gram Sabha meetings as a commoner. According to a respondent belonged to Kudumbashree group, *"it is not easy to get things done in government offices. We have to go multiple times. As my husband is the only earning member, and we are not in a position to lose his daily wages, I would go alone"* (Maggie, Kudumbashree group). Another respondent said such visits inspired her to become a Panchayat member. She had to visit Panchayat multiple times, yet her loan did not get sanctioned. Then she decided to contest thinking she would be able to help women like her.

It is further observed that a good majority, takes their secondary status as a normal phenomenon and they accept it as their 'karma' and moreover it never occurred to them that they are in a situation which needs to be changed. As explained under table 5.10 more than 70% of the financially dependent women who were not part of Kudumbashree (comparatively more educated and from well-to-do families), proudly accepted that they have no qualms in depending

their spouses for their financial needs and therefore in return, they willfully keep the patriarchal boundaries intact. Here, the oppressed willingly let their oppressors to take advantage of them and brush it off as their ‘destiny’. In Freire’s (1971:52) opinion as long as the oppressed fails to “*confront reality critically, objectify it simultaneously and to act upon it*”, the oppression continues to domesticate them. Obviously, majority of the housewives who were born in patriarchal families and brought up in accordance with patriarchal traditions, have either failed to understand the ‘hidden exploitation’ behind this or refused to act upon since they believed it was normal. Instead of recognizing their ignorance as a sign of disempowerment, they continue to live in a ‘protective bubble or safety net’ which is a byproduct of their privileges. Within this safety net, they do not need to worry about anything and for them challenging something which has been existing over the centuries is nothing but ‘foolishness’ which may derail their otherwise smooth lives. In other words, one cannot ‘empower’ someone who never felt ‘disempowered’ or someone who lives in ‘denial’ of their oppressive status. However, this observation does not stand true for those women who do not have a safety net around them to fall upon. Their feeling of disempowerment and helplessness, often lead to a deep understanding of the follies in their current situation, and they would start thinking of ways and means of ‘transform’ their lives.

5.5 Political Entry: Kudumbashree vs Non-Kudumbashree

The *slogan raised during the late 1960s as part of Women Liberty Movement in the United States, “The Personal Is Political” has a unique place in the history of feminism. Women’s studies in India use this as one of the most important concepts to understand the personal experiences of the everyday lives of women and the larger social and political structures. This movement challenged male supremacy by adopting a Pro-Woman line by refusing to blame the individual woman for her oppression (Hanisch, 1969/2006). It not only confronted the “*sex-role theory*” of oppression that says ‘women act as they do because “*that’s how they were taught*” by “society” but also started consciousness-raising groups (CR) to help women to identify their oppressors. These groups can be seen as a forerunner of women SHGs in the present era.

**The paper, “The Personal Is Political,” was originally published in Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation in 1970, written by Carol Hanisch in 1969. The origin of the slogan is still unknown*

Like in self-help groups of Kudumbashree mission, the participants of consciousness-raising groups were supposed to meet up periodically to reflect upon their experiences, build rapport and most importantly gain wisdom to act upon all those ‘situations’ which tied them up as mere subsidiaries to men. The comparisons do not end there. While the Kudumbashree mission primarily works for a sustainable future of its participants who could enjoy equal footing with men in economic, social and political spheres, through their movement Hanisch and her fellow feminists, stressed the importance of women 1) having a “*purse of their own*” (Susan B Antony), 2) entering into the public workforce and 3) sharing household and child care responsibilities equally with their husbands. Most importantly, this movement highlighted personal problems as political problems opposing the general trend in those days, which held women accountable for all their problems. Moreover, it emphasised ‘collective action for collective solution’ (Hanisch, 1969/2006) and in essence, Kudumbashree also visualises just that. The section below checks Kudumbashree’s role in transforming ‘apolitical’ women into ‘political’ ones with strong political convictions.

In the section below, the researcher discusses the nature of their entry into political space and inquires if they have taken up this challenge on their ‘own’. For those who oppose women reservation bill, it is nothing but a gimmick that helps only elite class of the society which allows men to replace themselves with women in their own families. The data suggests that the political ‘entry’ for a woman belongs to the upper strata of the society is comparatively easier than for someone who belongs to lower strata. The table (5.15) below compares the mode of ‘entry’ of both groups into politics. More than 30% from Kudumbashree group proudly ‘owned up’ their decision to enter into politics, against the other group’s 11.8%. From the responses, it was clear that a good number of respondents (52.9%) from the Non- Kudumbashree group had been entered into this field out of compulsion from either family members or party leaders. As pointed out by one of the key informants from Puthupally Panchayat, “*if someone is doing something out of compulsion, I don’t think he/she will devote much of his/her time and energy into it, like in the saying you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. Right? I have seen many who have entered into politics reluctantly, finishing up their term somehow, never to return to the political arena especially if the woman in question replaced her spouse or a parent due to reservation*” (Ponnan, Key Informant).

The second group has 14.7% of respondents who had been inducted into politics as replacements for their family members. At the same time, no one from Kudumbashree claimed that they had been chosen as a direct replacement. However, 37.3% from Kudumbashree group and 20.6% from Non-Kudumbashree group had claimed their decision to contest in the election was purely of political. A few of those who opted for ‘political decision’ entered into the political sphere, expecting to make a positive change with their political presence using whatever political connection they have. For example, said a respondent with utter pride *“when a prominent party approached me for this, I proudly accepted it as; I genuinely believe gone are the days when men make all decisions and women are confined to their own homes”* (Teenu, Kudumbashree group). The option “political decision” has also been chosen by those who have a party connection through their relatives. For example, a respondent having no Kudumbashree background said, *“my nephew was very active in politics, and when they facilitated my entry, I too played along as I did not want him to be offended. My husband was also a strong party member and a supporter. The current term is my second one, and I am the president now. (At the time of interview for a short period as the president went for medical leave)”* (Ammini, Non-Kudumbashree group). A few of them opted for this as they were currently in their second or third tenure as members who have become the ‘face’ of the party in their wards through their consecutive candidature.

Table 5.15 Nature of the Decision to Contest

Response	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Own decision	18	30.5	4	11.8
Compelled by someone	19	32.2	18	52.9
Political decision	22	37.3	7	20.6
As a direct replacement for your spouse/father due to women reservation	0	0.0	5.0	14.7
Total	59	100.0	34	100

Source; fieldwork data

Table 5.16 Reasons to Choose This Particular Political Party

Response	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Traditionally my family follows this party	42	71.2	29	85.3
This is the only party which offered me a seat	9	15.3	2	5.9
Me and this party share the same ideology	7	11.9	1	2.9
Compelled by family members	1	1.7	2	5.9
Total	59	100	34	100

Source: fieldwork data

This table (5.16) indicates that if and when women decide to contest, they prefer to do it under the wings of a party which is being followed by their families traditionally. In the total sample size of 93, 76.34% said so, but there is a gap of 14% between Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree groups which is in favour of Kudumbashree. The rest of the responses too pointed out that Kudumbashree's indicators were slightly better than that of Non-Kudumbashree group as it had more number of respondents who decided to follow a particular political party since their ideologies and beliefs were matched and also had a fewer number of respondents who said they had been compelled by their family members to follow a certain political party. Therefore, it can be said that Kudumbashree experienced women are slightly inclined towards taking up unconventional steps to enter into politics. However, it should be noted that Kudumbashree has somewhat failed to inculcate a new political culture which is totally independent of their family's political views among its participants as a good number of them still prefers to stick on with their family's political views. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that, within the organisational structure of the Kudumbashree, apart from the superficial efforts to raise 'consciousness' on matters related to women's socio-economic and political independence, nothing much has been happening towards strengthening women's aliber to fight against the hidden agendas of patriarchy.

Table 5.17 Duration of the Party Membership

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
2-4 years	5	8.5	3	8.8
4-6 years	15	25.4	0	0
Above 6 years	39	66.1	31	91.2
Total	59	100.0	34	100

Source; fieldwork data

This table 5.17 above indicates that nearly 91.2% of Non-Kudumbashree members were ardent followers of their own ‘family’ party and had been following the same party unofficially since their birth. This can be used in support of the fact that, if and when women decide to contest, they would choose the party which is being followed by their family members traditionally and is applicable to both groups. However, this indicator also points out the fact that Kudumbashree members were willing to try out different options when it comes to establishing alliances with the parties other than the traditional choice of their families. A good number of them have chosen to work with their current party after becoming Kudumbashree members, and according to table 5.16, a few of them had their own reasons other than family tradition to follow that particular political party.

Table 5.18 Political Connection via Family Members

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	24	40.7	27	79.4
No	35	59.3	7	20.6
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

The above table indicates that women without Kudumbashree background have an advantage over women with Kudumbashree background when it comes to the political connection via family members. When the former group has nearly 80% of women who had a political connection through their families, the later has just over 40% of women who had the same. From the further analysis, it is clear that out of 27 members from Non-Kudumbashree group, 23 of them said they were connected to someone very influential in the party, i.e. a sizeable 85.2%. Among the members with Kudumbashree background, 24 respondents had a political connection through their family, but just 14 of them were having connections with influential politicians, i.e. a 58.33%. From this, it is evident that one's political connection through the family is also relevant in his/her political entry irrespective of their Kudumbashree background.

Table 5.19 Close Relatives as Panchayat Members prior to the Election

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Spouse	1	1.7	7	20.6
Close relatives in my husband's family	2	3.4	7	20.6
Close relative in my own family	6	10.2	8	23.5
No	50	84.7	12	35.3
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

This table above (5.19) also depicts the fact that women who entered politics through Kudumbashree are more of like 'self-made' with no political Godfathers in the family as this group's 84.7% said none of their family members was elected as Panchayat members previously. At the same time, nearly 65% of the second group said their close relatives or spouse had been associated with Panchayat previously. A few of them believed, as wives of well-known politicians, it was their duty to cover up for their husbands' absence once they moved on to higher political battlefields. Said a respondent, *"I started my political career as a campaigner for my husband and his party. When he has moved on to a higher level, I took over from him and started looking after*

our ward on our party chief's insistence” (Rekha, Non- Kudumbashree group). Her next sentence proves that she had everything given to her on a silver platter on account of her privileged entry, *“during my first tenure, wherever I go, I would meet someone who knows my husband who helps me to get things done. Therefore, I never faced any challenges. Husband also helps me a lot with everything”* (Rekha, Non- Kudumbashree group). Comparing such women to Kudumbashree experienced women another respondent without Kudumbashree said, *“when we prefer to walk on a path which exists already or pointed out by others, a Kudumbashree experienced woman prefers to walk on a path which is being created all by herself”* (Jerly, Non-Kudumbashree group). From the above tables and information, it is clear that Kudumbashree members are not making their way out in this field as politicians on one fine morning like most of the Non- Kudumbashree members, but they are paving their way for themselves.

Table 5.20 Have you ever been known as an active member in a political party before your entry into Panchayat?

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	21	35.6	22	64.7
No	38	64.4	12	35.3
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

Answer to this question proves that Non-Kudumbashree women were majorly from political families and their political affiliation was well-known in their locality before their active involvement in the panchayat level election. However, their popularity may not have any connection with their own political activities prior to their first election; instead, it has more to do with their family’s political image since most of them have very active politicians in their families. At the same time, the majority from the Kudumbashree group had never been recognised as active politicians by others in their locality until their first election.

Table 5.21 Exposure to Campus/School Level Politics

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	10	16.9	8	23.5
No	49	83.1	26	76.5
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

The information in the above table 5.21 indicates that majority of the women who entered into politics later in their lives were not exposed to campus/school level politics during their younger days as 90% of the total respondents said ‘No’ to the question. Compared to the Kudumbashree group, Non-Kudumbashree group has a better figure. Those who grow up in political families get more chances to get involved in political activities during their growing up years. A few respondents agreed that they were part of the students’ wing of their political party on the insistence of their politically active fathers.

Table 5.22 Previous Exposure to Public Speaking/Debates

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	22.0	11	32.4
No	46	78.0	23	67.6
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

Table 5.22 discusses respondents’ exposure to public speaking/debates during their school or college days. Here also Non-Kudumbashree group has fared well compared to the Kudumbashree group as it contains a good percentage of respondents with previous exposure to public

speaking/debates. However, the difference is not much. In the total sample, 74.19% women responded negatively to this question, means the majority of women who enter into the political sphere, do not possess a high degree of oratory skills as they were not given ample opportunities to develop their capabilities as eloquent orators when they were young. If women leaders fail to communicate their ideas effectively, the entire reservation effort will be a wasted opportunity. Handling public speeches once they become active politicians, is tough even for those who had experience in public speaking when they were young. Pointing out her difficulty, one of the respondents said, *“Though I did some speeches previously as the vice president of the children's wing of my party, this is a completely different game altogether. With the help of my husband and other party leaders, I overcame such troubles gradually”* (Amala, Non-Kudumbashree group).

When asked about their biggest challenge to Non-Kudumbashree group, most of them highlighted their initial troubles to get a hold of oratory skills. In contrast, Kudumbashree group thankfully remembered how Kudumbashree gave them opportunities to try and test their oratory skills before entering into the political sphere. For example, elaborating on the advantages of Kudumbashree, one of the respondents from Puthupally said, *“at the time of elections, my group members compelled me to try my luck in formal politics knowing my fondness of social work. They rallied behind me strongly for everything. Earlier also I had no issues with public speaking. However, after joining Kudumbashree, my public speeches became crisp and succinct. I have been handling training classes for hours for Kudumbashree now”* (Reena, Kudumbashree group).

Table 5.22.1 Participation in Socio-political Movements before Entering into Panchayat: Non-Kudumbashree Group

	Frequency	Percent
As a participant in a political rally	7	20.
In a protest against a social evil	1	2.9
Never	26	76.5
Total	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data |

Table 5.22.2 Participation in Socio-political Movements before Entering into Panchayat: Kudumbashree Group

Kudumbashree group's response to the statement "if they have involved in any socio-political movements as a Kudumbashree member before becoming panchayat member".

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7
Disagree	24	40.7
Agree	8	13.6
Strongly Agree	26	44.1
Total	59	100.0

Source; fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given in a five-point scale including no opinion.

The above tables, 5.22.1 and 5.22.2 compares both group's involvement in socio- political movements before becoming panchayat members. When the Non-Kudumbashree group has 76.5% of respondents who had never been involved in any such movements, the later has only 42% of such respondents. From this data, it is clear that Kudumbashree gives them opportunities to take part in activities like this. The percentage of respondents in Kudumbashree group who strongly agreed with the statement is 44.1% which is more than double of the percentage of respondents who said they took part in a political rally or participated in a social movement from the Non-Kudumbashree group. Remarkably, the Non-Kudumbashree group has just one member who had been involved in a social movement previously, the rest of them had been identified themselves as one of the participants in a political rally. As pointed out earlier, respondents who have a strong political connection through their immediate family members would feel compelled to take part in political rallies out of obligation. Therefore, it cannot be said that this 20.6% took part in political rallies believing their participation would be useful in fixing what is wrong in the current political system. From their responses, it was clear that except for a few, the rest had participated in such events as passive spectators. On the contrary, the Kudumbashree group has a good number who were actively involved in movements targeting social change as organisers. e.g. anti- arrack protest.

Table 5.23 Response to: If there was no reservation do you think that you would have been chosen as a candidate?

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	10	16.9	5	14.7
No	49	83.1	29	85.3
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

Table 5.23 discusses women's opinion on one of the widely debated questions of recent times, i.e. *"if the reservation is needed or not?"* From their responses, it is crystal clear that irrespective of their Kudumbashree membership status most of them routed for women's reservation. Around 85% of the total respondents believed if there was no reservation, they would not even have considered for candidature. Stressing the importance of having women reservation in higher levels of political leadership, one of the respondents said, *"if there is no reservation, the egoistic male leaders would not even 'mind' us women. They would want our votes; they would ask us to walk around the ward for campaigning and would even give us a hint that we would be considered for candidature. However, when the election comes, we would be ignored as curry leaves. I believe only reservation can change this pattern. Therefore, I would strongly recommend there must be reservation in higher echelons of power as well"* (Shiby, Kudumbashree group). Many other respondents also expressed the same point of view regarding reservation in politics. Says another, *"they (male leaders) won't give us seats unless it is made mandatory"* (Sukritha, Kudumbashree group). However, a minority from both groups believed they would have been in their current position even if there was no reservation.

Table 5.24 Strongest Support During the Whole Process of Election

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Party co-worker	27	45.8	30	88.2
Family friend	5	8.5	3	8.8
Kudumbashree members	27	45.8	1	2.9
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

This table 5.24 discusses how Kudumbashree comes together for the election campaigning if one among them faces her ‘litmus test’ - election. When asked about their most reliable support during and immediately after the election, 45.8% of Kudumbashree group gave credit for their Kudumbashree colleagues, and precisely the same percentage identified their party colleagues as their strong support. Those who have a political connection through their immediate family members tended to give credit to their party colleagues. In some cases, if the respondent herself is an active party worker, she would give credit to her party co-workers. For example, in T.V Puram Panchayat where the researcher met a few influential women leaders who marched their way into the panchayat through their dedicated party work felt they have no one to thank for except the party in which they were members since their younger days. In Meenachil Panchayat also the researcher met one such respondent who said she was a party member first then a Kudumbashree member. Still, there is 45.8 % who believe Kudumbashree colleagues had been their most reliable support throughout their ordeals associated with the election. A few of them proudly introduced themselves as Kudumbashree recruited members in the Panchayat and acknowledged its role in their lives. In the words of a respondent, “*Kudumbashree made me what I am today*” (Liji, Kudumbashree group).

Table 5.25 Average Time Spent on Panchayat Related Activities Weekly

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
3-6 hours	3	5.1	0	0.0
Above 9 hours	56	94.9	34	100
Total	59	100.0	34	100

Source; fieldwork data

This table proves that the job of a panchayat member is not a part-time job for most of the respondents. Irrespective of their Kudumbashree membership, the majority of them said their job wanted them to be on alert 24/7. Issues that require their immediate attention pop up even in the middle of the night. If something crops up in the night, they would have to take help from their spouses as it may not be safe for them to travel during night time. Some of the respondents pointed out this as one of the major challenges. In some cases, knowing women members' difficulty to handle such issues in the night, people would contact their spouses directly.

Table 5.26 Average Time (weekly) Dedicated towards Kudumbashree Related Work by Members with Kudumbashree Background

	With Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent
0-3 hours	53	89.8
3-6 hours	6	10.2
Total	59	100.0

Source; fieldwork data

Unlike Non-Kudumbashree group, the Kudumbashree group has to dedicate a few hours from their busy schedule to attend weekly meetings of their groups. While a majority of them restrict their Kudumbashree activities under 3 hours weekly, 10.2% dedicate 3 to 6 hours weekly. Though none

of them was holding any leadership positions in Kudumbashree as it is against Panchayat regulations, many of them still help their Kudumbashree groups to complete their auditing and other administrative works unofficially. A few of them were actively involved in conducting awareness classes and workshops for Kudumbashree groups.

Table 5.27 Response to: Is it a Triple burden to Kudumbashree Group and Double Burden to the Non-Kudumbashree group?

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	18	30.5	9	26.5
No	39	66.1	25	73.5
Can't say	2	3.4	0	0.0
Total	59	100.0	34	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

When women join politics, they are expected to fulfil their duties at their houses first (especially if they are married) before leaving to take up political work. Therefore, some of them may feel exhausted and helpless. If she is a career woman, managing household chores, career responsibilities and panchayat may become very stressful. According to table 5.27 Kudumbashree group has 30.5% of respondents who felt it as a ‘triple burden’ as they have to find a few hours to Kudumbashree activities in their already busy schedule. Around 66% of the Kudumbashree said they never viewed this as a ‘burden’ but an opportunity to do their bit towards nation-building. In the words of a respondent, “if you ask, it is a ‘burden’ for me but a ‘burden’, I am enjoying rather than bitching about” (Reena, Kudumbashree group). While 3.4% of Kudumbashree group stayed away from a direct answer, everyone from the Non- Kudumbashree group responded with either a Yes or a No. Furthermore, this group constitutes the maximum number of respondents who felt they were not burdened with both sets of responsibilities as most of them were from affluent

families who could afford hired help at their homes which will reduce their workload. And to make things easier in the political front, they use their political connection via immediate family members.

5.6 Conclusion

The analysis of data collected on the socio-economic background of the 93 respondents shed light upon certain facts on women's political representation mentioned in the review of literature which facilitates the researcher to draw the findings of the study. Existence of "doxa", the concept originally put forward by Bourdieu (1977), and redefined by Kabeer (1999a:441) is absolutely true among the women from upper-middle-class families who entered into politics without Kudumbashree exposure. A good percentage of them believe there is nothing wrong with the traditional system in which a wife is being taken care of by her husband even if she is the better educated one. This analysis substantiated the fact that a significant percentage of women belonged to Non-Kudumbashree group had never visited any government institution unaccompanied or never attended any party meeting before entering into the political field. As a matter of fact, most of them were forced to take up politics due to different reasons such as compulsion by political parties or family members, fill up the vacancy created by a family member and the like. However, the analysis of data on women with Kudumbashree background validates the view that these women have an insight on the importance of women representation in higher political positions and gender equality as this group had a higher percentage of respondents who contested from non-reserved category. However, in general, most of the respondents have been brought up by their families in a traditional way, encouraging them to follow the social and political views of their families.

Nearly everyone agreed to the fact that women have a unique capability to understand the problems of marginalised and downtrodden people, and they have an added sense to identify and address their needs. However, some practical difficulties arising from the cultural norms of the society stay as obstacles on the political journey for both groups analysed, such as travelling in night, pooling car with gents, rumours cook up by opponents and the like. Besides that, they found it is hard to juggle the responsibilities as a member and those as a mother, especially for ones with young children or aged parents at home. Another barrier is the expense they have to meet for their regular

travel from one office to another, functions to functions and the like. Moreover, their unfamiliarity with political jargons and trouble with public speaking pose hurdles for them. In spite of all the aforesaid difficulties these women entered into politics with or without Kudumbashree exposure and surviving in this field fighting these odds. In furtherance, next chapter will analyse the data so as to draw answer for the queries; did Kudumbashree members fared better than the other group, and did the first group has any advantages over the second by comparing the lives of Kudumbashree based panchayat members, before and after joining Kudumbashree.

Chapter VI

Data Analysis: On the Wings of Kudumbashree

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, we have seen the differences in the socio-economic background of the respondents with and without Kudumbashree. Besides, we have discussed many issues faced by women on their way to political office. The analysis of the collected data so far reveals that with or without Kudumbashree, women leaders generally face a plethora of issues arising from various reasons including their financial dependency, social and cultural taboos and lack of political awareness. Generally, women who grow up traditionally have not been encouraged to think or participate independently in political activities. So, the question arises here is, what if such women end up in leadership positions untrained and inexperienced? Wouldn't they end up as mere proxies of powerful men unless they are trained in some way to withstand political pressure? In such cases, does the Kudumbashree mission have a role to play? To what extent, Kudumbashree encourages women to be politically active? Moreover, as envisaged, do women utilize 'the power and the skill sets' they have gained through Kudumbashree activities, to enter into the political field? From the analysis of the socio-economic data, it is clear that Kudumbashree plays an important role in bringing out women from lower socio-economic class into mainstream politics. This chapter mostly revolves around their stories about how Kudumbashree ignited their dream of becoming active political leaders in their own unique way by analyzing different aspects of their lives after joining this movement. The last section of this chapter checks if women members without Kudumbashree faced any serious troubles on account of their direct entry into politics.

6.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data used here has been organised under four sections. While the first section, discusses the general information about their involvement with Kudumbashree including years active and their experience as leaders, the second and the third sections discuss the changes in their lives with special emphasis on economic and social aspects of their lives. And the last section discusses

how Kudumbashree exposure helped the respondents to deliver their responsibilities effectively as elected representatives of Panchayat in the case of respondents with Kudumbashree background and in the case of others the discussion revolves around if they had faced any troubles during their first tenure due to their inexperience in the political field. This section also assesses the perception of Non-Kudumbashree members about Kudumbashree group's performance in the Panchayat.

Table 6.1 Years Active in Kudumbashree

No. of years active	Frequency	Percent
4 to 6 years	9	15.3
6.1 to 10 years	6	10.2
10. 1 to 15 years	23	39
above 15 years	21	35.6
Total	59	100

Source: fieldwork data

The table above reveals that all respondents had been members of Kudumbashree for more than four years. Out of nine, who opted for 4.1 to 6 years, four said they have just above four years of Kudumbashree experience which means they had only one-year experience with Kudumbashree prior to the Panchayat elections. A good majority of the respondents, 74.6 %, had above ten years of Kudumbashree experience and three among them had been with Kudumbashree, since its inception before 20 years. In the words of a respondent, *“I can’t believe it’s been 18 years since I came out of the ‘cocoon’. It was not like I was caged or anything. But till then my life was all about ‘my’ family, ‘my’ friends and ‘my’ neighbours. We all are changed now for the better. My world expanded beyond ‘me’ to include everyone in my unit (Kudumbashree). We think and work as a single unit now”* (Binu, Kudumbashree group).

Table 6.2 Exposure through Organisational Hierarchy of Kudumbashree

Positions	Frequency	Percent
CDS/ADS leadership	12	20.3
President	13	22.0
Vice president	1	1.7
Secretary	11	18.6
Treasurer	2	3.4
Volunteer	2	3.4
No leadership	18	30.5
Total	59	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

Table 6.2 reveals that except 18, all others (69.4%) have been exposed to some kind of leadership roles during their tenure with Kudumbashree. While 20.3% of them associated themselves with higher tiers of Kudumbashree mission (Area Development Society ADS or CDS Community Development Society), a modest 22 % of them had worked as their own unit's Presidents. Vince Lombardi says, "*great leaders are not always born but are made*" (Aline and Ramkumar, 2018:94). There may be some 'natural' leaders around the world born with certain leadership qualities. Even for them, opportunities to nurture inborn talents are essential. As pointed out in the literature review, one cannot produce desirable results, if he/she does not have access to necessary 'resources' and 'ability' to convert them into useful 'functionings' even if she/he has been born with extraordinary talents. It was clear from the socio-economic data analysis, that a substantial number of women were deprived of opportunities to be politically or socially active while they were growing up. For such women, Kudumbashree was a solace which offered them a few opportunities to 'nurture' some of their innate talents. As Kudumbashree is created by the State itself to promote women's empowerment and had been designed to work in unison with the Local

Panchayat it had never faced severe resource crunch. Through different government machineries, Kudumbashree members were given proper training on various subjects and encouraged to play a proactive role in their own empowerment. Gradually, Kudumbashree has become an institution where women picked up new leadership skills and polished their innate capacities with the help of their peers. With Kudumbashree, they got opportunities to rise and shine socially and politically; their access to resources has been increased to a certain extent. Moreover, their public visibility has been increased after joining in Kudumbashree. In the total number of respondents, those with Kudumbashree experience outnumbered the other itself reveals the fact that Kudumbashree has a substantial role to play in recruiting its members to active politics. A seemingly worried Non-Kudumbashree member said, *“it is high time to introduce ‘reservation’ to women having no Kudumbashree experience as we are struggling to establish ourselves among them. They are so demanding and make noise, unlike us who prefer to remain silent. So, it is becoming tough for a Non-Kudumbashree member to get a seat for the election”* (Rency, Non-Kudumbashree group).

As expected, do such initiatives encourage women to develop a political consciousness independent of their family member’s political views? Fung and Wright (2003) noted that through such initiatives, women should be able to "(re)formulate their political interests", by expanding their political capacities after a reasonable period of exposure. To ascertain this, the respondents with Kudumbashree had been asked the reason behind selecting that particular political party. While a whopping 71.2% of respondents said, they were in fact selected the same party followed by their families traditionally, only 11.9 % said they chose that particular party because they believed in the same ideologies. From this, it is evident that Kudumbashree may have acted as an inspiration to women to be politically active, but it does not encourage women to think or act independently. Table 6.3 below that depicts years active in Kudumbashree, and the reason to choose their political affiliation reaffirms this trend. As per the information in the table, 31 respondents with more than ten years of Kudumbashree exposure had chosen the same party that their families had been following traditionally. However, six among the same group said instead of following their own family’s choice blindly they made their choice based on their beliefs. Therefore, the trend prevalent here is that, if one decides to contest, she chooses a party in which her husband or father is a member though Kudumbashree has a definite role in bringing women into politics.

Table 6.3 Years Active in Kudumbashree Vs The Reason to Choose their Current Political party

Years active	Reasons	Frequency
4 to 6 years	Traditionally my family follows this party	5
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	2
	Me and this party share same ideology	1
	Compelled by family members	1
6.1 to 10 years	Traditionally my family follows this party	6
10. 1 to 15 years	Traditionally my family follows this party	15
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	5
	Me and this party share same ideology	3
above 15 years	Traditionally my family follows this party	16
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	2
	Me and this party share same ideology	3
Total		59

Source; Fieldwork data

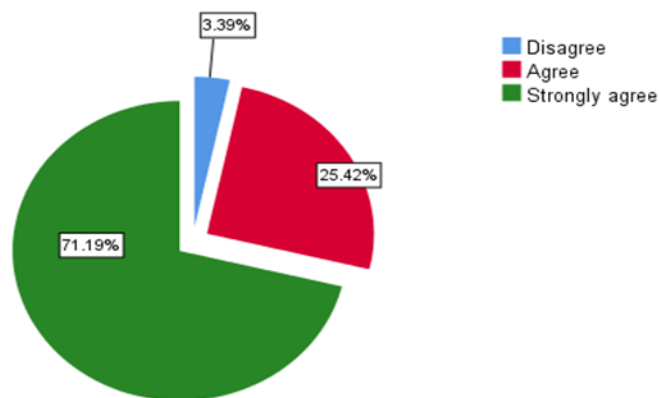
6.3 Economic Empowerment after Joining Kudumbashree:

As we discussed in the introduction and the review of literature, financial dependency of a woman has far-reaching consequences. Many studies suggest, even her social acceptance and social status can have a direct link with her financial independence. From the study of the socio-economic background of the respondents, it was clear that the Kudumbashree group had the maximum

number of less-educated women whose monthly income had been meagre. Interestingly, this group housed the maximum number of financially independent respondents. However, small the income is, it has the capacity to improve one's confidence and feeling of self-worth. In this section, the respondents had been asked to reflect on the changes in the financial aspects of their lives once they joined in Kudumbashree. Questions were asked to find out if the improved income or loan accessibility had led to an increase in their self-esteem, decision making power in the family and their money management skills.

Figure 6:1

Economic empowerment indicator- My income/loan accessibility increased



From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (strongly agree) the options were given on a five-point scale. In the above figure 6.1, no respondent had been opted for Strongly Disagree and No Opinion, therefore those options were excluded.

From the figure 6.1, it is clear that a good percentage of women 96.61% felt (as 71.19% 'strongly agreed' and another 25.42% 'agreed' to the statement) that they were in fact financially benefitted from Kudumbashree. While a majority said, though there has not been a sharp rise in their monthly income, they were able to draw loans from the organization effortlessly without collateral. Elucidated, a respondent who had no source of income previously, *"though, I take money from my husband's pocket to pay back the loan which I took from my group, it was indeed a help for me when we required money all of a sudden, for my kid's college admission last year"* (Surekha, Kudumbashree group). Kudumbashree's inability to curb its participants' habit of raiding their partners' pockets in order to pay back the loan, has been pointed out by many as one of the

drawbacks of this movement. The table below 6.4, shows the responses, for the question if they were making a substantial income out of their profit from Kudumbashree activities.

Table 6.4 I Make Substantial Income out of my Profit

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7
Disagree	21	35.6
Agree	9	15.3
Strongly Agree	28	47.5
Total	59	100.0

Source; filed work data; no one answered the option 'No opinion' therefore, it is excluded from the table above.

From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

From, the table it is clear that while 62.8% either "strongly agreed or agreed" to the statement, a not so scanty 37.3% either "disagreed or strongly disagreed" to the statement. The difference between the percentage of respondents who said they were financially benefitted with Kudumbashree and those who said they had not made substantial income through Kudumbashree is 33.89%. Therefore, from the above responses of two statements, it is clear that this 33.89% except for the 3.39% who said they had not made any financial benefit from this organization, must have availed loans from Kudumbashree for consumption purposes. Those who had "agreed or strongly agreed" were the ones who run small scale enterprises individually or in collaboration with others earning substantially. During data collection, the researcher had visited some of such enterprises like restaurants, tailoring shops, soap manufacturing units and mobile health checkup units.

Table 6.5 “I have the Freedom to Manage my Finance.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	12	20.3
No Opinion	1	1.7
Agree	16	27.1
Strongly Agree	30	50.8
Total	59	100.0

Source: fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (strongly agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

As per the table 6.5, a good percentage of respondents (50.8%) with Kudumbashree background strongly agreed, that they had the freedom to manage their finance as their spouses believed they had better knowledge regarding financial matters than their spouses. When asked if not for doing business, what was the purpose of taking a loan from Kudumbashree, many of them pointed out that they had used it for their children’s education. As pointed out by a respondent, “*if we, women get some money where else should we spend, other than for our children’s education as we don’t waste money on alcohol or cigarettes? Therefore, they (spouses) should feel proud of us*” (Surekha, Kudumbashree group).

Precisely 27.1% of the respondents were of the opinion that, though, they had the freedom to manage finance, they preferred not to use it. They used to take permission from their husbands first. This observation once again confirms the fact that the Kudumbashree empowered women tend to accept the traditional patriarchal power relations existing within their families. Furthermore, they utilize their increased income in ways that their spouses too would approve of. Interestingly, one among the 59 chose not to answer this query. Strikingly there existed a 20.3% within the Kudumbashree group who said they had no freedom to manage their finance independently.

Table 6.6 Freedom to Manage Finance Vs Independent Source of Income

I have freedom to manage my finance (Response)	Do you have your own Source of income	I have freedom to manage my finance (Frequency)	Source of income of the respondent (Frequency)
Disagree	Yes	5	5
	No	7	7
Agree	Yes	8	8
	No	9	9
Strongly Agree	Yes	22	22
	No	8	8
Total		59	59

Source: fieldwork data

The table above shows how does the lack of independent source of income have been acting as a barrier for women's empowerment as discussed in the previous chapters. According to table 6.6 out of 30 respondents who strongly agreed to the statement "I have the freedom to manage my finance", 22 of them had their own source of income while 8 of them had no income which is a huge difference. Obviously, women having own source of income enjoy better 'freedom' at their houses. They confidently make decisions regarding financial aspects of their lives, whereas women with no source of income usually withdraw themselves from the responsibility of decision making especially if the decisions are related to spending money. Surprisingly out of the 30 respondents who strongly agreed to the statement, eight (26.67%) claimed that they enjoy absolute freedom to manage their finances despite being a dependent. Not so surprisingly, there existed a significant number of respondents who said even if they had a source of their own income, they do not have the freedom to manage their finance, the frequency of which is five out of 12. This again underlines

the existence of a few who find it very hard to break patriarchal traditions within their family even after years of Kudumbashree exposure. The table below 6.7 further justifies this observation.

Table 6.7 Independent Source of Income Vs Criticism from Family

Source of income of the respondent	Response to "my decisions draw no criticism from other members of the family"	Source of income of the respondent (Frequency)	My financial decisions draw no criticism from other members of the family (Frequency)
Yes	Disagree	8	8
	Agree	5	5
	Strongly Agree	22	22
No	Disagree	11	11
	Agree	9	9
	Strongly Agree	4	4
Total		59	59

Source; fieldwork data

The table 6.7 (Source of income vs response to the statement “my decisions regarding investments draw no criticisms from other members of the family”), further strengthens the argument raised under discussion part of table 6.6. The table reveals that 27 out of 35 respondents who said they had an independent source of income, had either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement which means they were absolutely free from criticisms from their family members. It must be noted that out of 24 respondents who said they had no independent source of income (45.83%) said they were indeed facing criticism from their family members for the decisions they make. At the same time, 54.17% said they had not faced any criticisms so far, even if they had no income of their own. However, the difference between the two is less than 10%. A respondent who belonged to this 45.83% elaborated on “*as I am not earning, I don’t feel nothing even if he doesn’t listen to my advice regarding financial matters. He usually takes decisions alone, but if it is about a loan availed from Kudumbashree, I would definitely interfere. But he would tease me saying if you can’t listen to me don’t come to me for repayment instalment*”

(Priya, Kudumbashree group). Therefore, the key takeaway from this inference is that, having ‘own income’ definitely improves one’s position in the family, and those who do not have own income believe and accept that they deserved to be criticized or told what to do with the family’s finance.

From the analysis of the information related to the economic aspects of their lives after joining Kudumbashree, it is clear that they all except a negligible few, have been financially benefitted from this initiative in one way or other. While a good percentage among them turned it as an opportunity to start small scale business ventures, a few others have seen it as a facility to draw loans easily. For those who were not used to the idea of “saving” previously, it has become a regular practice now, especially for women from lower socio-economic strata. Apart from that, the existence of a bank in their back yard has brought in much-needed relief to many of them. From the interviews, it is clear that a few women still depend on their husbands for the money for weekly savings or for repayment of loans which is a bad mark for the initiative which envisaged women’s independence in all sphere.

6.4 Changes in the Socio-political Aspects of their Lives after Joining Kudumbashree

Social and political exposure offered by the Kudumbashree to those women who were earlier confined to the four walls of their own home has far-reaching significances. The changes were visible in their houses, in their neighbourhood and in the whole panchayat. The most apparent change in the panchayat level is pointed out as Kudumbashree women’s presence in every public meeting conducted by the Panchayat. To analyze the ways in which they get social and political exposure during their tenure in the Kudumbashree, the researcher included questions to know if there was an improvement in their ability to communicate, whether they were exposed to public speaking, whether they had got opportunities to participate in social movements, whether they started frequenting panchayat offices and banks and the like. The following table summarizes their answers to queries related to the changes in their interpersonal skills as a result of their group work.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, Kudumbashree is not just a place for women to gather around to deal with weekly thrift and credit activities of its members but also a place where they can engage in serious conversations which may trigger a campaign for a favourable social change. One of the respondents recalled how a casual remark from one of the members about the drinking

habit of her husband during a weekly meeting had kick-started a movement in favour of an alcohol-free panchayat.

Table 6.8 Indicators to assess their improvement in their inter-personal skills including political awareness and social commitment

Statements	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total
I have developed thorough knowledge about my rights and duties as a citizen	0	0	0	23.7	76.3	100
I started expressing my political opinions without fear	0	15.3	1.7	20.3	62.7	100
I started expressing my social concerns openly	0	10.2	0	22	67.8	100
I started participating in social movements	1.7	40.7	0	13.6	44.1	100
I started speaking in public gatherings	1.7	13.6	0	15.3	69.5	100
My ability to communicate effectively has improved	1.7	11.9	0	16.9	69.5	100

Source; fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

The Kudumbashree mission organizes classes, workshops and other training sessions in every panchayat regularly. The table above shows that everyone with Kudumbashree background has "either agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement "I have developed thorough knowledge about my rights and duties as a citizen". Even those respondents, who said Kudumbashree did nothing to improve their financial condition (3.39 % as per table 6.1) also felt they have indeed improved their knowledge regarding rights and duties as a citizen. While a substantial 83% agreed that Kudumbashree exposure enabled them to take a strong political stand, 15.3% disagreed and one chose the option "no opinion" to the same. In the words of a respondent, *"We all belong to different political parties, so we don't discuss politics in every meeting. However, politics comes up once in a while, especially during election time. Generally, what I felt is,*

this group has given us an opportunity to view political happenings in a different point of view” (Aparna, Kudumbashree group). Usually, women make their judgments based only on what they hear from the discussions inside their houses, but within the group, they are exposed to different kinds of opinions who belonged to different political parties. Therefore, they would be able to make better judgements without personal bias. Elaborated a respondent, “before joining this group, I thought it is a crime to have an opinion that is different from my husband’s. After attending numerous classes, I now know that everyone is entitled to have their own opinion, and I also learned how to deal with difference of opinion in an amicable way” (Jincy, Kudumbashree group).

The case is not very different for the third statement “I started expressing my social concerns openly”. Afterall, Kudumbashree brings in young mothers as well as mothers of young teenaged girls together. When news about sexual harassments breaks out, they all engage in conversations connected to it. They discuss ways and means to ensure the safety of their own and their young daughter’s lives. While conducting meetings and awareness classes, they get opportunities to mingle with resource persons from diverse backgrounds. Most of the respondents said they make use of such opportunities to know more about better career options for their children. From health to wealth management, women’s safety to career guidance, marital counselling to issues related to child development, they discuss absolutely everything during such meetings. While a good number of women said, they had been a part of an anti- alcohol protest which harnessed massive support from the general public all across Kerala. As per collected data, 44.1% of them said they had been actively involved in organizing social movements mainly against alcohol, and around 13% said though they had not been organized movements, they took part in one or two such events as members of Kudumbashree Mission. However, around 42% of respondents said they had never been a part of any such movements.

The following table 6.9 checks if there is a relationship between a family’s economic status and participation in social movements.

Table 6.9 Family's Economic Status Vs Participation in Social movements

Family's economic Status	<u>Respose</u>	Participation in Social Movements (Frequency)
BPL	Strongly Disagree	1
	Disagree	7
	Agree	3
	Strongly Agree	15
APL	Disagree	17
	Agree	5
	Strongly Agree	11
Total		59

Source; fieldwork data

As per table 6.9, out of 26 BPL respondents, 18 of them either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement which means a 69.23% of them had been associated themselves with social movements during their tenure with Kudumbashree. At the same time out of 33 APL respondents, 17 of them (51. 51%) said they had never been associated themselves with any kind of social activism. However, from the APL section, a little less than 50% either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement. From this, it is clear that people belonged to BPL are the ones who usually take the brunt of the evil effects of alcoholism and domestic violence. Therefore, whenever there are protests against such things, the BPL people easily relate to it and take part in such agitations actively. From the APL section, those who agreed with the statement is little 'less' than those who disagreed. Unlike those belonging to BPL, APL people enjoy some privileges based on their higher economic status; therefore, they will not readily agree to take part in social agitations.

The answers to the last two statements in table 6.8 are meant to track their improvement in their interpersonal skills. For both statements, the majority (nearly 86%) said as a result of their group involvement their interpersonal skills, including that of public speaking, has improved a lot. Only a few respondents (less than 15%) felt there is not much improvement in their interpersonal skills by disagreeing to the statement. To get more clarity on this, a table (6.10) has been plotted below with the responses to the question “Do you have previous experience in public speaking prior to Kudumbashree?”

Table 6.10 Experience in Public Speaking prior to Kudumbashree

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	22.0
NO	46	78.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: fieldwork data

Table 6.10 shows that a good percentage (78%) of the respondents had never been exposed to public speaking previously. Pointing out how Kudumbashree had helped them to overcome their fear of public speaking and stage fear a respondent explicated, *“in weekly meetings, we take rotations to say either welcome or thanks speech. Thus, we make sure that everyone gets at least one chance in a year to face the audience. When I did it for the first time, though there was no microphone, I made many mistakes, and I even forgot whatever I was prepared in advance. However, no one laughed at me. I didn’t feel ashamed also as we were all riding on the same boat. Gradually, I overcame my fears, and in fact, I don’t need prior preparations now if I want to do a public speech. The right words would come out at the right time”* (Binu, Kudumbashree group).

Even for those respondents who said they had been actively involved in debates and elocutions while they were at school/college, the Kudumbashree experience gave them a chance to fine-tune their skills. One of the respondents elaborated on how Kudumbashree has been helping its members to fine-tune their public speaking skills, *“I used to do some speeches at school, but that was a long time back, and the scripts were given to us by teachers. All we had to do is byheart and say it aloud. When I joined in Kudumbashree, I had to prepare the content of the speech in advance and render it appropriately. I help others now to prepare their speeches and work as a resource person with CDS. Moreover, I feel proud and happy when my colleagues in Kudumbashree do well in public speaking while those members who are not from Kudumbashree struggle to get a grip on public speaking”* (Laisamma, Kudumbashree group).

As pointed out in the fifth chapter, if one is to compare the Kudumbashree group and the Non-Kudumbashree group, the latter consisted of respondents who had lesser socio-political exposure. From table 6.11, it is clear that Kudumbashree offered its members an opportunity to expand their socio-political exposure even more. For some respondents who rarely go out, Kudumbashree offered genuine reasons to get out of their houses regularly. They started visiting government institutes and banks more often. To be precise, 86.4% of the respondents nodded in favour of the statement “I started visiting govt institutes/banks more”.

Have Kudumbashree activities increased their social recognition? The response to the next statement in table 6.11 reveals precisely this, except one all others believed that due to Kudumbashree activities the address attributed to them as ‘someone’s wife/daughter’ has changed to their ‘own’ names. Elucidated a respondent, *“before Kudumbashree happened, except our nearest neighbours and friends, all others recognized us as someone’s wife or daughter from so and so family. But now through Kudumbashree, everyone calls me by my ‘name’.* As I was the CDS chairperson for a while, my name became familiar to all women across the Panchayat even before panchayat election” (Mincy, Kudumbashree group).

Table 6.11 Indicators to assess if their social visibility had been increased or not, through Kudumbashree activities

Statements	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total
I started visiting govt institutes/banks more	1.7	11.9	0	18.6	67.8	100
I became a known face in my neighbourhood	1.7	1.7	0	15.3	81.4	100
I started accepting challenging responsibilities	0	13.6	0	16.9	69.5	100
My social acquaintances have been increased	1.7	1.7	0	15.3	81.4	100
I successfully translated my expanded social network into votes	1.7	6.8	3.4	16.9	71.2	100
I started attending Gram Sabha meeting regularly	3.4	15.3	0	16.9	64.4	100
I did surveys on behalf of panchayat	0	42.4	0	8.5	49.2	100
As a Kudumbashree member, I raised issues in Gram Sabha meetings	0	32.2	0	8.5	59.3	100

Source: fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

For those respondents who had adorned any leadership positions in higher tiers like ADS/CDS, it was an opportunity to expand their social connections further. When asked if their Kudumbashree experience had inspired them to take up more challenging positions (panchayat member), a good number of them, 86.4% responded positively. Elucidated a respondent, “*during my Kudumbashree days, I used to assist our then ward member to conduct Gram Sabha. In fact, I worked as his point of contact in my ward. If something comes up, he would contact me and leave the rest of the things with us. When I convened a few Gram Sabha meetings successfully, I realized that it is my turn to give it a try. My colleagues also encouraged me. Luckily for the next election, my ward came under reservation and here I am*” (Celinamma, Kudumbashree group).

Women usually grow up in one village and married off to another village. There they have to start everything from scratch, be it their social acquaintances or relationships within their conjugal family. Two examples from Kallara Panchayat are discussed here to elaborate on how Kudumbashree can be of help in such situations. The older among the two, who is 54 years of age, was born and brought up in a very modest family. Due to her family circumstances, she could not study beyond intermediate. The other member is 33 years old and a nurse by profession. Marriage brought them both to this village. Before becoming active in public life through Kudumbashree, they both went through similar experiences. When the former approached the bank for a loan as soon as she came to this village to start a small-scale business, she failed to produce two people who could vouch for her integrity as per bank's rule. So, her application got rejected and had to get rid of her dream project. Years later, she became a Kudumbashree member and served the organization in the capacities as President, Secretary and CDS chairperson. Her social network expanded gradually through Kudumbashree activities, and she went on to become a member of the director board of the co-operative bank in her village. She gave all credits to Kudumbashree. The second case is also very similar. She wanted to start a poultry farm in her house and applied for the permission in Panchayat where she knew no one, and as expected, this did not get sanctioned even after visiting multiple times. Later she had to abandon the project and decided that one day she would do 'something' to help 'wannabe' entrepreneurs like her. Later she joined in Kudumbashree and became an active member and president of the group, which in turn opened up her way into politics. Now she knows how she can be of help to her colleagues like herself who aspire to open small-scale businesses. She does her best to ease off the red tape that prevents young women from chasing their dreams. Kudumbashree supported them both by giving them the much-needed social footing and recognition.

Kudumbashree members are an inevitable part of Gram Sabha meetings. They attend such meetings in bulk numbers and try their best to make their voices heard. According to the table above, more than 80% of the respondents started attending Gram Sabha meetings regularly after taking membership in Kudumbashree. Among those who regularly attended, 68% used to raise a few issues on behalf of Kudumbashree and their panchayat. Discussions under 6.9, reveals that women belonged to the upper strata of society prefer to stay away from public meetings and social movements. In such a scenario, a question that needs to be answered is, who will "voice"

women's concerns? When this question cropped up in a conversation with a Kudumbashree empowered one, she proudly stated, *"who else? We - the Kudumbassree members have been doing this for so long, and we will continue to raise questions until we get satisfying answers. Our demands are all genuine and rightful so that no one can deny us."* (Binu, Kudumbashree group). Since, the inception of Kudumbashree, its members have been doing precisely that, voicing women's concerns out in the open with the help of their improved communication skills and confidence, in a language that men leaders cannot reject.

Table 6.12 Bank/government institution visits and Gram-Sabha attendance comparison before and after Kudumbashree

Statements	Before Kudumbashree				As a Kudumbashree Member			
	SD	D	A	SA	SD	D	A	SA
Frequency of bank/gov visits	35.6	33.9	5.1	25.4	1.7	11.9	18.6	67.8
Gram Sabha attendance	33.9	25.4	20.3	20.3	3.4	15.3	16.9	64.4

Source; fieldwork data; no one answered the option 'No opinion' therefore, it is excluded from the table above. From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

The table (6.12) above depicts the improvement in both the parameters before and after Kudumbashree. According to the table, the percentage of respondents who started visiting bank/government institutions after they joined in Kudumbashree had increased to 86.4% from 30.5% which means Kudumbashree inspired at least 55.9% of respondents to venture out of their houses seeking new opportunities to expand their capabilities. In the case of Gram Sabha attendance, under 'before Kudumbashree' category, while 20.3% of respondents reluctantly

agreed that they attended Gram Sabha sometimes, another 20.3% ‘strongly agreed’ that they used to participate actively in all such meetings. The percentage of respondents who started attending Gram Sabha after joining Kudumbashree also marked a massive increase, i.e., 81.3% (64.4% "strongly agreed" and 16.9% "agreed").

Table 6.13 Indicators to assess how Kudumbashree exposure helped the respondents in delivering her responsibilities effectively as a Panchayat member.

Statements	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total
The panchayat visits I've paid as a Kudumbashree member had given me an overall idea about its functioning	1.7	16.9	0	23.7	57.6	100
The rapport I've created with Panchayat officials came handy once I became a member	1.7	27.1	0	18.6	52.5	100
The experience with conflict resolution within the Kudumbashree has helped me to deal with conflicts in Panchayat committee	0	11.9	0	22	66.1	100
My tenure with Kudumbashree enabled me to think beyond party lines and to work towards the betterment of women and children	0	8.5	0	20.3	71.2	100
I became aware of existing gender norms and social injustices after joining Kudumbashree	0	8.5	0	20.3	71.2	100
Kudumbashree helped me to take a strong stand against unjust and uncivil practices in the society	0	18.6	0	16.9	64.4	100
Kudumbashree colleagues remained as a strong pillar of support during the whole process of election	1.7	3.4	1.7	23.7	69.5	100

Source: fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

Table 6.13, indicates that the frequency of their Panchayat visits has increased drastically after they became Kudumbashree members. According to the table above, 81.3% of the respondents either "agreed or strongly agreed" when they were asked if such visits to the panchayat had helped them to develop an overall idea about its functioning. Most of them said they have indeed made use of this opportunity to observe the duties and responsibilities of panchayat members. Said, one of the respondents, *"through frequent visits for different purposes, we had the opportunity to pick up certain jargons used commonly there. So, when I am hearing them now, I am able to respond to them like a pro. I had seen people's disappointment when they had to visit the panchayat office multiple times for the same reason. Now I am trying my best not to cause any delays from my part"* (Remya, Kudumbashree group). However, less than 20% felt otherwise. For example, disagreeing to the statement one respondent who had just one year of Kudumbashree experience prior to the election said, *"I was an ordinary member, and I rarely visited its office in the Panchyat. So, I can't say I get the opportunity to learn its functioning through Kudumbashree or by establishing rapport with the staff over there"* (Sunandha, Kudumbashree group).

A whopping 88.1% responded positively for the query "if their Kudumbashree experience had helped them to resolve conflicts that may arise in panchayat committee meetings". Conflicts may arise in Kudumbashree meetings as it brings together women from diverse economic, political and social background. Sometimes, issues related to loan disbursal and repayment crop up as big issues that could potentially damage the psyche of the group. When incidents like this happen, someone or another rise to the occasion and handles it perfectly well. Kudumbashree members regularly get opportunities like this to witness how their leaders are settling certain differences within the group. Elaborating on this one of the respondents said, *"As I was my unit's president for quite a long time, I had to manage several scuffling within the group frequently. We used to resolve our conflicts within ourselves amicably. Now as a ward member, I found myself in between people who fight, on a day to day basis. When such issues crop up, I never run to my husband for help like some Non-Kudumbashree members do. I am confident that I have the capacity to handle it myself. Sometimes, some issues take us to the police station. Even then, I stand strong and confidently handle the situation"* (Suja, Kudumbashree group).

Pointing out Kudumbashree members' ability to keep composure as and when a situation demands it and their keenness to raise their voice whenever it requires, one of the key informants elucidated, *"if someone has Kudumbashree background and belongs to the opposition party, it will be tough for the ruling party to 'shut them up'. They (members with Kudumbashree background) are more alert and cautious when it comes to corruption. In fact, they make more noise than a male member in the opposition party"* (Shabu, Key Informant). The next three statements in the table 6.13 analyses how Kudumbashree helped them to overcome gender prejudices and inspired them to work towards collective good for women fraternity rather than remain as mere 'tools' for propagating patriarchy. Through Kudumbashree's gender self-learning initiatives, members were given highly contextualized learning material laced with real-life experiences to initiate sustainable changes. Kudumbashree brings in women together from the diverse socio-political background. They function as a unit while at Kudumbashree, keeping aside their differences. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that if someone approaches them for something, they would consider them as a human being who needs help first before considering his/her gender or political affiliation. In the words of a respondent, *"When women approach us for help, unlike men members, we do listen to them patiently. If they need urgent financial help, we often give them money right away from our own pockets and wait for the panchayat to reimburse"* (Reeba, Kudumbashree group).

Awareness classes are very common in Kudumbashree. They all get a great deal of information through such classes, especially about their own rights as individuals. Through Kudumbashree, they found their voices to protest against social evils like alcoholism and sexual harassments against women. Issues like this would bring them together irrespective of their class, caste or religion. They fight together as 'one', hoping to make the world a better place for their daughters to live in. The last statement in table 6.13 is to find out whether they get wholehearted support from their Kudumbashree co-workers at the time of Panchayat elections. From the responses, it was obvious that at the time of election they all except a negligible few got maximum support from their Kudumbashree co-workers. One of the respondents who had disagreed said, as her opponent was also from Kudumbashree, she was not expecting wholehearted support from Kudumbashree. In most of the cases, if there is a candidate from Kudumbashree, they all 'vote' in favour of her without giving a second thought to the party that she is representing. But if the ward is a stronghold of a particular party, they will not vote without considering party equations.

Does Kudumbashree make strong women stronger? Throughout the data collection, the researcher met many examples who fit this bill. The stories of these two members from Puthupally panchayat, a 41-year-old member of the fifth ward and a 62-year-old member from the second ward deserved a special mention here. They both had been very actively involved in the socio-cultural circles in their respective communities since they settled down in this village after their marriage. Though both had enjoyed a reasonable amount of freedom during their growing up years, they never felt it was necessary to think differently from their own families' socio-political views. When they decided to contest in Panchayat, they both opted for the political parties traditionally followed by their respective families. From younger days, they both have been known for their bold attitude. Nobody restricted them from expressing their opinions. While the elder of the two has been a Kudumbashree member since its inception in her panchayat, the latter is a member from 2007. They both had served Kudumbashree in different capacities. Their active involvement with the Kudumbashree has been pointed out as one of the reasons for their political entry since none of them had influential full-time politician at their homes. In the case of the younger of the two, before Kudumbashree, she was known only among her church-going neighbourhood, but when she became CDS chairperson, she became a known face among other communities as well.

For the other, Kudumbashree is her 'soul' and is something very close to her heart which has strengthened her capacity to talk publicly and inspired her to be a social worker who is committed to helping everyone irrespective of their political affiliation. Since she has been working as a legal volunteer with Kudumbashree, she is now an expert on women's rights and associated laws. She advises others on how to deal with the cases on domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Both of them said they would boldly handle if they have any difference of opinion with party leaders. So far, they have not come across any such situations, but if such a situation arises in the future, they will not shy away from expressing their opinions. They both wish to nurture their political dream further by staying in political limelight for the rest of their lives. However, the younger of the two said, stressing her desire to remain as a grassroots politician, *"I don't wish to climb up the political ladder though I will get the block panchayat seat for the coming election. I prefer to stay back here in my ward because I enjoy working for my own people and in this way, I get to know them better. Becoming a politician who is disconnected from ground realities*

is my worst nightmare. Moreover, I feel that this is the best way to help my Kudumbashree unit further”.

6.5 Non-Kudumbashree members’ Life as a First-time Elected Representative in the Panchayat

From the socio-economic analysis of the respondents, it was clear that Non- Kudumbashree group had certain advantages due to their family’s financial stability and political connections when they decided to venture into this field. They usually get a ‘red-carpet’ welcome into this field, unlike the Kudumbashree group. The following table assesses if Non-Kudumbashree members had faced any troubles immediately after they got elected as Panchayat members for the first time.

The table below reveals that more than 88 % of the women without Kudumbashree background had little or no knowledge about the ‘functioning’ of the Panchayat before starting their stint as panchayat members. Likewise, the number of respondents who had handled some sort of leadership roles before entering into panchayat is just above 38 % which means a good percentage of them enter into the public sphere as freshers having no or with limited leadership skills. From the responses of next two statements, it is clear that a good number of them had no idea of politics before entering into this field and more than 50% of them faced troubles when they were asked to chair meetings as standing committee chairpersons. As expected, 73.5% of the sample strongly agreed that they had never visited the panchayat office until their first election. This indicates that a large number of the direct entrants had been recruited to the panchayat level politics not because they have established themselves as notable leaders or they have exemplary knowledge about the functioning of the panchayat but mainly through their family’s political connection.

When someone enters into unknown territory, they will have to spend additional time and energy to get themselves familiar with the system. Here, a great majority of the respondents agreed that it took a while for them to become familiar with the rules and regulations of the panchayat. While some had to depend on others like their husbands or party leaders for this, others developed a habit of reading training materials provided by the KILA (Kerala Institute of Local Administration) to get hold of the affairs in the panchayat. A meagre 8.8% believed, they did their best without being over-dependent on others.

Table 6.14 Life of a Non-Kudumbashree Member as a First-time Elected Representative

Statements	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total
I had no idea about the functioning of Panchayat	5.9	5.9	0	11.8	76.5	100
I had never handled any leadership positions previously	2.9	35.3	0	11.8	50	100
I had no idea about politics	14.7	32.4	0	14.7	38.2	100
I found it very difficult to chair a meeting	20.6	26.5	0	26.5	26.5	100
I spent a lot of time to get familiarized with the rules and regulations of the panchayat	8.8	14.7	0	32.4	44.1	100
I had to depend on others a lot	0	8.8	0	26.5	64.7	100
I had difficulty in public speaking	17.6	20.6	0	23.5	38.2	100
I had difficulty in solving conflicts among two parties	14.7	23.5	0	35.3	26.5	100
I missed the kind of support and camaraderie among Kudumbashree members	8.8	44.1	0	14.7	32.4	100
I was unaware of issues related to children	14.7	47.1	0	29.4	8.8	100
I had to work hard to develop a strong vote base during campaign time	11.8	41.2	0	11.8	35.3	100
I was unaware of gender issues	8.8	50	0	17.6	23.5	100
I used to accept the party chief's decisions without fact-checking	8.8	26.5	2.9	38.2	23.5	100
I had difficulty to say 'no' to a familiar person	17.6	44.1	5.9	20.6	11.8	100

Source: fieldwork data; optimistic (Strongly Disagree) to pessimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

A leader who fails to express themselves in front of a crowd often ends up as a laughing stock to the audience. Here, a great majority of the sample agreed that they did not have much exposure to public speaking previously, and faced troubles when they got elected into panchayat for the very first time. A respondent without Kudumbashree who had been actively involved in party works since her childhood recollected, *“though I did some speeches previously, this is a completely different game altogether. When I gave a public speech during the campaigning time, I literally went blank on the stage. With the help of my husband and other party leaders, I overcame such troubles gradually”* (Amala, Non-Kudumbashree group).

Only a meagre 17.6%, confidently said that they had never faced any difficulties while engaging in public speaking. A good percentage of them (61.7%) "agreed/strongly agreed" that they had struggled with public speaking. The same has been discussed in one of the focus group discussions conducted in Parathode Panchayat, where a male representative pointed out the Non-Kudumbashree members' tendency to shy away from public speaking opportunities. To underline this, one of the Kudumbashree respondents pointed out the difference, *“in Kudumbashree, we get opportunities to perfect our public speaking skills. In the meetings where everyone belongs to the same socio-economic and cultural background, no-one teases you for your lack of public speaking skills. We all make errors, and we support each other to overcome them. So, by the time we become active in Panchayat level politics, most of us overcome stage fright and shyness. However, their (direct entrants’) cases are different, most of them are newly elected, and sometimes they are expected to address a large crowd like a professional where there is no room for errors. Therefore, it’s quite natural that they will have this tendency to avoid all such opportunities. Eventually, they too will overcome their fears and become better speakers”* (Sheeja, Kudumbashree group).

A panchayat member is expected to be an expert of ‘conflict resolution’ as it is one of their major duties to resolve conflicts between different groups or individuals. They deal with cases where they are expected to pacify two or more aggrieving parties frequently. The data suggests that more than 60 % of the Non-Kudumbashree respondents had faced difficulty in resolving conflicts among two parties, whereas a whopping 88% Kudumbashree empowered respondents felt they were capable of handling such issues. Remembering her troubles in this area, one of the Non-Kudumbashree respondents who is a first-time member said, *“daily people would approach*

us to settle down their differences like land boundary issues, marital discords etc. Sometimes, I ask my husband to intervene as it is not a familiar forte for me. They make loud noises and would hold on to their stances until they are right or proven wrong” (Jishasree, Non-Kudumbashree group).

The next statement checks if the direct entrants had missed the kind of support and camaraderie among Kudumbashree members during their campaign period. The percentage of respondents who either "strongly disagreed or disagreed" slightly exceeded than that of either "strongly agreed or agreed" as most of them have come to this field with strong party support. However, around half of the sample felt (47%) they had indeed missed the kind of support and camaraderie among Kudumbashree members during their campaign period. On the other hand, when asked about Kudumbashree colleagues' support during campaigning period to Kudumbashree empowered respondents, except for a few (nearly 6%, table 6.13) the rest acknowledged their colleagues' support wholeheartedly. For example, one of the respondents said with absolute conviction, *“my colleagues in the Kudumbashree stood by me throughout the process. They even asked me to relax at my home after filing nomination. From the moment I expressed my ‘halfhearted’ willingness to contest, they started working for me”* (Ancita, Kudumbashree group).

From the analysis of socio-economic indicators of both sets of respondents, it is clear that the group without Kudumbashree consisted the maximum number of educated and employed respondents belonged to well- to- do families who possess better chances of being heard if they ever decided to be vocal against sexual exploitation and harassments. Still, a good percentage of them agreed that their knowledge regarding issues related to gender and children, was not sufficient when they entered into public life. When asked about if she would interfere in matters related to sexual harassment, one of the respondents without Kudumbashree who was a graduate from an affluent political family said, *“I read news related to such matters in the newspaper. Apart from that, my social status does not allow me to talk about them in public or to interfere. Therefore, I generally keep ‘mum’ on subjects like this”* (Jerly, Non- Kudumbashree). At the same time, a good number of women with Kudumbashree respondents had expressed their strong willingness to lend their voices to those women who suffer silently.

Running a successful election campaign is not always easy, especially for the first-timers as it involves a series of seemingly tough activities carefully drafted to influence the electorate. From raising the necessary fund to designing campaigning materials, the candidates are supposed to give their undivided attention to every aspect of the election. In the case of a first-timer woman candidate, the toughest part is said to be managing those occasions where she needs to be on stage addressing the public. During one-on-one interviews, many respondents identified this as a major reason for women's lower participation in the electoral process. Data suggests that a not so scanty 35.3% of the Non-Kudumbashree members strongly agreed and 11.8 % some what agreed to the statement that they had to work hard to develop a vote base as they were unfamiliar to the constituents. However, more than half of the sample said they had it easy as they had strong support from party cadres and were from well-known families in the area. Acceptance of party chief's decisions without critical thinking is found to be rampant among Non-Kudumbashree group as more than 60% the direct entrants either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they will follow the directions of the party chief no matter what. When a woman becomes an elected representative, people generally expect them to be a proxy of someone influential. The next statement checks if the respondents are able to assert herself without being submissive to her recruiter's interests. In the case of direct entrants, who use their family's influences or political connections to enter into the political field, saying "no" to a known person especially if that person has a direct role in recruiting her could be very difficult. Being assertive means showing the ability to stand up for oneself without being arrogant or rude but with the utmost respect towards the right of others. The above table indicates except for a meagre 17.6% the rest is not so confident about them being assertive. While 44.1% of the sample reluctantly disagreed to the statement, 5.9% stayed away from a direct reply. The rest either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement implying they may find it difficult to say "no" to a known person.

Table 6.15 Political affiliation Vs Reason to Choose the Current Political Party

Political affiliation	Reason to choose the present political party	Frequency	
		Non-Kudumbashree	Kudumbashree group
Congress I	Traditionally your family follows this party	9	13
	You and this party shared same ideology	1	1
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	0	4
Kerala Cong	Traditionally your family follows this party	11	4
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	1	0
	Compelled by family members	0	1
BJP	Traditionally your family follows this party	1	2
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	0	3
	Me and this party share same ideology	0	2
CPIM	Traditionally your family follows this party	7	18
	Me and this party share same ideology	0	1
CPI	Traditionally your family follows this party	1	3
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	1	0
	Me and this party share same ideology	0	1
	Compelled by family members	1	0
LDF Independent	Traditionally your family follows this party	0	1
	This is the only party which offered me a seat	0	2
	Compelled by family members	1	
Muslim League	Traditionally your family follows this party	0	1
BDJS and Janapaksham	Me and this party share same ideology	0	2
Total		34	59

Source; Fieldwork data/

The table above which compares respondents' political affiliation with the reason to choose the present party underlines the findings under the table 5.15 in the fifth chapter, that irrespective of the affiliated parties or their Kudumbashree background women prefer to follow and contest from a party which is being followed by her family traditionally. Therefore, the researcher has made another comparison between their answers for the statement "I will compromise with the party if I have to" and their reason to choose the present party with both sets of data as in Table 6.16. Within the Kudumbashree group, 42 respondents said that their reason to choose their current party as "Traditionally your family follows this party", i.e. 71.1% against the Non-Kudumbashree group's 29 out of 34, i.e. 85.29% which means Kudumbashree group has a fewer

number of traditional followers of a political party. While 58.62% from Non-Kudumbashree group either "agreed or strongly agreed" with the statement "I will compromise with the party if I have to", 47.62% of the Kudumbashree did the same. From the table, it is observed that though Kudumbashree marked a better figure than the Non-Kudumbashree group, the difference is just above 10%, which cannot be considered as an outstanding one. However, this group has only 7.1% of respondents who had strongly agreed that they would compromise with the party if they are forced to do so while the other group has 37.93% of such respondents. And this indicates that the advantage of being a self-help group member is not limited to the expansion of one's social contacts or public speaking skills, but it adds to their assertiveness as well.

Table 6.16 Reason to Choose the Current Political Party Vs Willingness to Compromise

Reason to choose the present political party	Responses to I will compromise with the party if I have to		
		Non-Kudumbashree	Kudumbashree
Traditionally your family follows this party	Strongly Disagree	1	4
	Disagree	4	14
	No opinion	7	4
	Agree	6	17
	Strongly Agree	11	3
Total		29	42

Source: Fieldwork data

6.6 Non-Kudumbashree Group's Perception of Kudumbashree Group's Advantages

This section examines if Kudumbashree is a hit or a miss in the eyes of Non- Kudumbashree group, which consisted of women primarily from an elite background. In the first few elections after implementing Panchayati Raj Act, the general trend among power- hungry men politicians was bringing in their close female relatives to replace them just to keep the 'power' within the family. Men who were not used to the concept of being sidelined from power tried different means to hang on and thus to defeat the purpose of such an ambitious policy. Installing women as their proxies has been a regular practice among male politicians and not so surprisingly the civil society and the State termed such things as teething troubles. At the same time, women who were not used to 'poli-tricks' happily allowed those de facto 'male' representatives to take over their de jure rights as well. Out of multiple instances, where respondents vouched for the existence of proxy syndrome at least in the beginning years of reservation, one of the responses from a veteran leader who alternate the candidature between him and his wife is worth mentioning here. In the focus group discussion carried out in one of the selected panchayats, where he was asked to share his perspective on the changes after the law, he boastfully said, *"it's either my wife or me. Ever since I started my political career, I was the elected representative of my ward. If and when my ward falls into the reserved category, I field her. When she became the president in the last term, she did whatever I've told her"* (Vinod, Key Informant).

In another panchayat also, a veteran politician shared his experience, with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, *"during the initial days, due to different reasons we were forced to field some of our leaders' wives as candidates who obviously had no clue about the functioning of the Panchayat. They used to come to Panchayat with their 'escorts' (their husbands). During committee meetings, they too sat in the chairs behind their wives with the remote control. This was the usual practice until recently. Nowadays, no one is coming with a male escort. This could be because of the influence of Kudumbashree like initiatives"* (John, Key Informant). Similar views have been shared in the focus group discussion conducted in a different Panchayat as well. According to a male panchayat member who has been serving his second stint as a Member, Kudumbashree like initiative did 'wonders' to the overall quality of the women's political participation. To quote his exact words, *"in the initial years, the only thing women did was pretending to drive a vehicle while its actual control rested with their husbands. I personally felt the law did more damage*

than good after seeing those women's abysmal performance. First of all, most of them have been forced to enter into this field without genuine desire. They reluctantly went through the formalities that too, with the help of their husbands. However, my impression has been changed after seeing some leaders who came to politics through Kudumbashree. During my first term as a member, there weren't many women with Kudumbashree background. After a gap of 5 years when I reelected, the first change I noticed was the increase in the number of women representatives with Kudumbashree background who have been exhibiting a genuine desire to work for the benefit of people. They are easy to work with, and they never run away from 'extra' work. They try their best not to engage in corruption. Their presence in every ward makes things easier for the ward member. Moreover, Kudumbashree women who are aware of the development plans of panchayat demands its timely implementation in their wards. Their role in ensuring accountability of ward members is truly praiseworthy" (Siju, Key Informant).

From the responses of the male ward members, it was clear that there were attempts from men's side to subvert the reservation policy by installing women as their proxies at least in the beginning years. Later with the introduction of Kudumbashree, the scenario has slowly changed in most of the panchayats as it started inducting more women into the public sphere. Gradually, Kudumbashree women's presence increased up to a level that Non-Kudumbashree women started feeling insecure and wanted another 'quota' within quota for them.

Table 6.17 Non- Kudumbashree Members' Response to: "I noticed Kudumbashree members are having some kind of idea about the functioning of the panchayat."

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	17.6
Disagree	7	20.6
Agree	8	23.5
Strongly Agree	13	38.2
Total	34	100.0

Source; fieldwork data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

Table 6.17 indicates that a good percentage of the respondents (61. 7%) felt that those who have come through Kudumbashree possess some kind of advantages over them. From developing a strong voter base to improving one's communication skills and public speaking skills, the direct entrants had pointed out many advantages of Kudumbashree empowered women. Overall personality development and better connection with the grass-root have also been pointed out by the Non-Kudumbashree group. According to a direct entrant, *"Kudumbashree women know how to land back on their feet after a fall just like a cat"* (Maiyamma, Kudumbashree group). Certain respondents have also noted Kudumbashree women's self-reliance from the Non-Kudumbashree group. While many of the Non- Kudumbashree women expect someone else to clear the path for them, the Kudumbashree women themselves find new paths for them to march on. To quote a response from a Non- Kudumbashree member, *"as Kudumbashree members, they have prior knowledge about Gram Sabha meetings and other such activities of the panchayat. They used to help their ward members to conduct such meetings in their wards unofficially. Therefore, it is easier for them to manage once they become panchayat members officially. They absorb changes and adapt well too"* (Maneesha, Non-Kudumbashree group).

In focus group discussions, many participants, especially males, believed Kudumbashree women are much better than their counterparts who have not worked in Kudumbashree as they exhibit more resilience and self-esteem. Besides, they are more assertive, and they demand justice more aggressively if they feel they are being sidelined or denied any position of power, unlike Non-Kudumbashree women. Even the most prominent critics of this movement cannot look past these facts, that Kudumbashree women understand the 'pulse' of the masses better, they establish a better connection with the marginalized, and finally, they integrate more comfortably into the system.

On the other hand, there is a handful of women who felt, Kudumbashree did nothing for the cause of women's political empowerment except for the fact that it helped a few 'uneducated' women to kick start their political career. For example, a respondent from Non- Kudumbashree group said, *"I am not sure how it is going to help them. I would say these Kudumbashree women are 'overconfident' and noisy. Apart from making loud noises in the committee, I don't think they work any better than us, but if they recruit women with a decent education, I would happily welcome them"* (Rency, Non-Kudumbashree). Interestingly, some women categorize

Kudumbashree women as a super noisy bunch of ladies who have ‘tongues’ all-around their necks. Some believe Kudumbashree women are ‘overconfident’ and arrogant who use their Kudumbashree background to get some ‘votes’ but never help their Kudumbashree colleagues in return. Those who have come through their political connection strongly believe, they do not need any support from Kudumbashree like organization as they have the backing of their own political party.

Table 6.18 Non- Kudumbashree Members’ Response to; “Do you think would it have been helpful to carry out your duties more effectively if you had worked in Kudumbashree previously”

	Frequency Percent	
Yes	20	58.8
No	10	29.4
Can't say	4	11.8
Total	34	100.0

Source; Fieldwork data

The above table indicates that a good number of the sample, 58.8% felt that, they could have been carried out their duties and responsibilities in a much better way if they had worked with Kudumbashree previously. They felt so because they believe, it would have helped them to polish their public speaking skills, conflict resolution skills and most importantly, their social network. While a nominal 11.8% remained undecided, 29.4% believed Kudumbashree exposure would not have helped them in any way.

6.7 Conclusion

As pointed out in the beginning, this chapter elaborately discussed how Kudumbashree inspires its participants to try a stint in politics. From the analysis of the data, it is clear that Kudumbashree sends a substantial number of women into politics armed with skills that are

either newly picked up or polished through their activities in the mission. This study brings forth evidence to prove that empowerment has been happening in all aspects of their lives, including their political awareness. Kudumbashree has a definite role in bringing women into politics especially those women who have no political connection through their families, but if one decides to contest, she chooses a party in which her husband or father is a member. Therefore, it is evident that Kudumbashree has somewhat failed in inculcating political values that are free from the influence of their so-called male ‘caretakers’ like fathers/spouses. However, improvements have been noted in their financial management skills, interpersonal skills and more importantly, in public speaking skills. Moreover, the data suggests, Kudumbashree has a definite role in making them more confident and assertive. When she ventures into the unfamiliar territory of politics, all such things should be of great help. Towards the end of this chapter, we had also seen several difficulties faced by the Non- Kudumbashree group when they suddenly started their political career. The next chapter mainly discusses the political journey of the two sets of respondents with special emphasis on the changes in different aspects of their lives.

Chapter VII

Data Analysis: The Transformation

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter elaborately discussed how Kudumbashree brings ordinary women into politics. So far, the analysis of the collected data gives out a clear indication that Kudumbashree sends a substantial number of women into politics armed with skills that are either newly picked up or polished through their activities in the mission. In the case of an ordinary woman irrespective of her Kudumbashree background, the decision to contest in an election itself is a huge life-changing one that has ramification in different aspects of her life. One has to ponder on a few adjustments before making the final call by finding out ways and means to keep their family affairs on track. Interestingly, the majority of women wants to preserve the usual rhythm of their families and make sure that their improved position will not affect it in any way. In doing so, they may exhaust themselves by being engaged in some kind of work 24/7. Majority of them prefer to do all the household chores themselves without relying on the help and proudly announce they wake up early to finish up all the works before leaving for Panchayat and willingly propagate ‘male entitlement’. However, a few of them hires domestic helpers since they find it stressful to deal with both professional and personal duties. Nevertheless, women’s presence in local government bodies was a massive change from what had been existed until then, and women took this as a source of empowerment. Through their presence in the Panchayat, a good percentage of women have turned their lives around. Moreover, it compelled the society as a whole to transform their views on women’s capacity to be political leaders. This chapter discusses their journey as members of the panchayat to find out if they get more love, respect and attention from their families and the people around them, the extent of improvement in their ‘self-esteem’, and the major differences between the way Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree members deal with political pressure and tackle challenges. In addition to this, this chapter also checks if members with Kudumbashree background exhibit a strong willingness to stay back in the political field compared to members without Kudumbashree. The last part of this chapter discusses case studies as well.

7.2 Embracing Challenges Gracefully; Kudumbashree Vs Non-Kudumbashree

Changes are inevitable in everyone's life, and sometimes, some changes catch you off guard. For many first-time political entrants, this change has been 'one of a kind' that too happened unexpectedly. Whether someone likes those changes or not, he/she should try his/her best to adapt to the situation and make most out of it. For a homemaker, adapting to such changes requires a lot of hard work and determination as they have not been used to the very idea of engaging in politics. As pointed out earlier, once elected, one has to make changes in almost all spheres of her life, be it childcare or carrying out household chores. However challenging the changes are, one has to find ways and means of coping up with them gracefully. From the reactions of the respondents, it was clear that a majority of them still prefer to do all their household jobs by themselves rather than being a dependent on her family members. To quote one such reaction from a respondent who expressed her hesitation to leave aside household chores for her not working husband, *"though he will be there at home all day with nothing much to do, I won't ask him to help me with the usual household job as that's against our culture. I don't mind waking up earlier than usual and finishing up all the chores myself before leaving for panchayat related works"* (Jossy, Kudumbashree group).

Irrespective of one's Kudumbashree background, a substantial number of the respondents believed, as mothers and caretakers of the house, the duty of maintaining the usual rhythm of their own houses was solely theirs' in addition to fulfilling their duties as elected representatives. Obviously, the position of 'member of panchayat' brings in a certain amount of power and authority even if someone is a proxy of her husband or an influential leader. Changes are bound to happen in all areas of her life, including the way her family treats her and the way society recognises her. Table 7.1 below discusses changes in their domestic and personal spheres and also checks, if there is an increase in their social respectability as a result of their position in the panchayat.

Table 7.1 Changes in the Domestic and Personal Side

Statements	With Kudumbashree					Without Kudumbashree			
	SD	D	A	SA	Total	SD	D	A	SA
Recognition without Spouse's Label	0	5.1	10.2	84.7	100	5.9	17.6	27	50
Increase in the number of telephone calls	0	0	15.3	84.7	100	0	0	32	67.6
Increased number of invitations	0	1.7	10.2	88.1	100	0	2.9	27	70.6
People started asking Advice	0	3.4	11.9	84.7	100	2.9	14.7	21	61.8
People started noticing my absence	0	0	16.9	83.1	100	0	5.9	32	61.8
The increased willingness of male members to help	0	13.6	10.2	76.3	100	5.9	35.3	18	41.2
The adjustment from other family members	0	13.6	11.9	74.6	100	5.9	35.3	24	35.3
Increased invites for public speeches	0	1.7	18.6	79.7	100	0	11.8	29	58.8

Source: Field work data; no one answers the option 'no opinion' hence excluded. From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale;

The first statement in the above table finds out if they had been recognized without the label/address of their spouses when they had approached the general public. Since there is a considerable difference between the percentages of two sets of respondents who strongly agree with the statement, it can be said that respondents with Kudumbashree background possess a much better chance of being recognized in their 'own' name. In the case of Non-Kudumbashree group, since a majority of them have fought the election using their father's/husband's or family's name the chances are high that others would recognize them in those names. From the responses of wives/husbands who alternate their candidature due to reservation, it is clear that sometimes, even constituents get confused with who the actual representative is (Elisa, Non-Kudumbashree group). For example, according to a male member who fields his wife as the candidate whenever the situation demands, *"I have been approached by the people in the ward believing I was the member when she got elected last time. Anyway, that is fine with me as ultimately, I am the one who advises her what to do and what not to do"* (Vinod, Key Informant). However, for the majority of respondents who have had experience with Kudumbashree, their faces and names were already familiar to people around them through Kudumbashree activities.

The next statement checks if respondents receive a lot more telephone calls and invitations to different functions than usual to know if they have become notable personalities in the area. Here also, the respondents with Kudumbashree background painted a much better picture than Non-Kudumbashree group as 84.7% of them strongly agreed with the statement against the latter's 67.6%. Both groups felt they had been receiving a lot more telephone calls enquiring about a wide variety of problems and invitations for different functions than earlier. The statement follows next clearly indicates that people approach them for expert opinions as well. Besides the matters related to Panchayat, the constituents often ask their help with a lot of other issues too. However, those who have no Kudumbashree background agreed that sometimes the constituents prefer to talk to their husbands first as they too are well-known in society and have been more experienced in some issues. Respondents from both groups agreed that people, especially women from their wards consider them as a counsellor with whom they could share their innermost feelings openly. Therefore, in addition to fulfilling their duties as ward representatives, they adorn different masks, sometimes of a marriage counsellor, a career advisor for their children, or a

deaddiction expert depending upon the problems they are dealing with. Women in their respective ward always approach them with all kinds of problems and trust them like elder sisters. When people approach them for solace, women members happily lent their ears, unlike male members who usually show no interest in solving someone's personal problems. Throughout the interviews, the women members maintained that they consider this as an opportunity to do social work and never seen this as an opportunity to make some 'extra' money.

The next statement analyses the impact of their absence from public platforms where the organizers have anticipated their presence. Before getting elected to the panchayat, most of them had been leading simple and quiet lives. During those days, even if they had to skip some functions where they had been invited to, the hosts would not have noticed their absence. However, this is not the case now. Elaborated a respondent, *"earlier I was like an invisible entity means my presence or absence would have made no difference at all. However, this has changed entirely now. I am not invisible any more. People would notice my absence from functions Even if I send my husband to cover, the host would be angry at me. However, I try not to skip any funerals where my presence could make a difference by consoling the grieving family"* (Tessy, Kudumbashree group).

The next two statements check if their elected position led to a positive change in their status within the patriarchal family set up. The respondents from both groups agreed that there is an improvement in their status in their families. However, the percentage of women from Kudumbashree group stands out with a whopping 76.3 % against Non-Kudumbashree group's 41.2% "Strongly agree". They feel that their opinions are valued, and their hard work is more appreciated than previously by male members in their families. Moreover, their family members are happily rearranging their schedule to match with theirs' without complaining. When asked about this, one of the respondents from the Kudumbashree group said, *"now that I am an elected representative, he cannot simply ignore me, especially after seeing others approaching me for advice. If an entire panchayat could listen to my point of views, why can't he do that?"* (Sulojana, Kudumbashree group).

From the socio-economic analysis, it was clear that the Kudumbashree group had the maximum number of unprivileged women who had suffered less freedom of choice with comparatively lower educational standards. Therefore, there is no wonder if they felt that their opinions had

been neglected and their views were not respected by their family members. However, their stint with the Kudumbashree and later their entry into full-time politics encouraged a good number of husbands to go easy on their wives. Now some of them are willing to make adjustments of their preferred choices of food and its serving time. Interestingly, no one from both groups came up to say they had switched roles with their husbands entirely so that they could concentrate 100% on Panchayat duties alone. Except for a negligible few, the rest had to juggle both responsibilities without much help from their extended families. During a focus group discussion, a male member said appreciatively, *“yes, we are proud of them as many of them proved they are indeed deserving it, but a few of them are still struggling hard to maintain the balance between household responsibilities and the member’s job effectively. While we could (men members) simply walk away from our houses to panchayat, these ladies come here after finishing up numerous chores at home. Though, we jokingly call them part-time ward members and say, if you elect ‘men’ you will get ‘full time’ ward members, we really respect and admire their efforts”* (Justin, Key Informant).

From responses of these two statements, it is clear that women themselves are not ready to share their burdens of domestic responsibilities with their husbands. To highlight one among such responses, *“I may be a panchayat member or even a President outside my house. But the moment I enter my house, I leave behind all those tags and become a dutiful wife to my husband and a caring mom to my children. I don’t expect my husband to help me in Kitchen duties. I cook, clean and run all sort of errands for my family as usual”* (Sariga, Non-Kudumbashree group). Here she attempts to re-define her femininity by being loyal to her husband, children and domestic duty. She upholds her culturally defined gender roles and tries her best to be politically correct. In this way, she expresses her willingness to conform to prominent norms in her community and presents her perceptions accordingly. Though political correctness has brought in some significant transformations from the *“oppressive social discourses” in the past, it has the capacity to bring in new forms of “discursive coercion”* which in turn would ensure furtherance of an oppressive culture. (Harris, 2003:93 and Foucault, 1984).

The next statement in the above table checks if women members are frequently invited for delivering public speeches which is an indicator of their increased social status in the community. A good number of the respondents from both groups find themselves with a lot more invitations

for delivering public speeches. Here also, the Kudumbashree group made a niche for themselves with more than 98% of the respondents "either agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement. As pointed out earlier, some of the Kudumbashree trained women exhibited an exceptional talent to deliver excellent public speeches. At least they do not run away from opportunities to deliver public speeches. Once elected, they would get even more chances to deliver speeches, especially in the events conducted by their Kudumbashree units. In the Kudumbashree group, some respondents are handling hours of de-addiction classes and entrepreneurship training programmes for their respective Kudumbashree units. On the contrary, a considerable number of respondents from the other group reported that they handed over the chances for public speaking to their husbands who are active politicians. The following response of a women member who is the wife of an influential political leader in the area with a strong political background underlines their attitude towards public speaking, *"he is a well-known political leader in our area. Therefore, if I get an invitation, I ask my husband to cover up for me"* (Anju, Non-Kudumbashree group).

Table 7.1 reveals that a great majority utilises this opportunity to improve their status irrespective of their Kudumbashree membership. However, in the case of Kudumbashree trained women, there is a sharp increase in their social graph. They make use of this opportunity to improve their social respectability and climb up the social ladder further. At the same time, the other group may not experience such an enormous jump in their social mobility from their previous status as most of them were from the 'privileged' class of the society. The respondents from Non-Kudumbashree group who were retired teachers said they never felt any difference as they had been approached by many people for personal advice and public speaking previously also.

The table 7.2.1 elaborate on the extent of respondents' family's and political party's influence on her political decision making. The first statement of table 7.2.1 checks if they discuss the proceedings in the panchayat committee with their family members. A quarter of the sample with Kudumbashree background and a nominal 15% of the other group "disagreed" with the statement implies those who discuss every aspect of the committee meetings with their family members are comparatively higher in the Non-Kudumbashree group. There is only a 10 % difference between the percentages of respondents who opted for either "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement implies, with or without Kudumbashree background

women generally discuss ‘happenings’ in the panchayat with their family members. However, from the responses of the next statement, it is clear that, though they discuss the happenings of the panchayat committee at homes, at least a few of them refrain from seeking direct advice from their family members on matters related to Panchayat. Compared to Non-Kudumbashree group, the Kudumbashree group maintains a better position here too as it consists of nearly 46% who ‘disagreed’ to the statement against the former’s 35%. Generally, women do discuss most of the happenings at the panchayat with their spouses or with other family members, and a significant number of them seek their advice also.

Table 7.2.1 Five-item Family and Party Involvement Scale (Valour and Resilience Scale)

(SD indicates extreme positive response)

Statements	With Kudumbashree						Without Kudumbashree					
	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total	SD	D	NO	A	SA	
Discuss happenings in the panchayat at home	0	25.4	0	50.8	23.7	100	0	15	0	35.3	50	
I seek father's/spouse' opinion	0	45.8	1.7	45.8	6.8	100	0	35	0	32.4	32.4	
I've no opinions that contradict party's view	24	40.7	5.1	23.7	6.8	100	14.7	38	2.9	23.5	20.6	
I will compromise with the party if I have to	10	32.2	13.6	37.3	6.8	100	2.9	18	26.5	20.6	32.4	
I choose not to voice my opinions for my family's well being	10	30.5	20.3	32.2	6.8	100	5.9	18	32.4	17.6	26.5	

Source: Fieldwork data; From optimistic Strongly Disagree to pessimistic Strongly Agree the options were given on a five-point scale

The next statement checks if the respondents have opinions that contradict with the party’s view. Here as well, to the dismay of the Non-Kudumbashree group, the Kudumbashree empowered ones have a better figure to their credit, i.e., while the Kudumbashree group consists of 64.7% of respondents who either "disagree or strongly disagree" with the statement, the other group has 44.1 % who agree or strongly agree that they have no opinions that contradict party’s views. They believe as the party is instrumental in giving them a chance in politics, they

should be loyal to the party no matter what. The statement, “I will compromise with the party if I have to” examines a hypothetical scenario to know if they compromise with the party when an altercation arises. A significant number from both groups stayed away from a direct answer, i.e., 13.6% from Kudumbashree group and 26.5% from Non-Kudumbashree group. However, Kudumbashree group had 42.2 % of the respondents who said they would not compromise with the party under any circumstances while the other group had just 20.9% who vouched for the same. When asked another hypothetical situation to know if and when a disagreement with the party poses a threat to the safety of their family would they opt for ‘silence’ in other words would they remain silent (without voicing their differences), a good number of respondents out of the total sample, i.e., 52.7% opted for ‘no opinion’. However, Kudumbashree group’s 10% strongly disagree, and 30.5% disagree against Non- Kudumbashree group’s 5.9 % and 18% respectively, prove that they are indeed bolder and fearless than the Non-Kudumbashree group.

From the analysis under the table 7.2.1, it is revealed that Kudumbashree group has a fewer number of respondents who refrained from seeking direct advice from their family members or party elders and also it has a greater number of women who said they have no qualms to express their opinions out in the open even if those were against party’s views. To check if there is a statistically significant level of difference between the two groups in their ability to exercise their political agency on account of their Kudumbashree exposure or lack thereof, the researcher explored the differences in their total score for family/party involvement with the help of Mann-Whitney U test. It assesses differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure (Pallant, 2005). This test compares the medians of the two groups and ranks them.

Table 7.2.2

Ranks: Valour and Resilience Scale				
	Kudumbashree exposure	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Total score for family involvement in politics	With Kudumbashree	59	41.24	2433.00
	Without Kudumbashree	34	57.00	1938.00
Total		93		

Table 7.2.3

Test Statistics- Mann Whitnev U Test	
	Total score for family/party involvement in politics
Mann-Whitney U	663.000
Wilcoxon W	2433.000
Z	-2.720
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.007
a. Grouping Variable: if the respondent has Kudumbashree exposure	

As per the table above, the probability value (p) is less than 0.05, so there is a statistically significant difference in the total scores for family/party involvement of Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree groups.

Table 7.2.4

Respondent's take on Gender Discrimination (SD indicates extreme positive response)

Statements	With Kudumbashree						Without Kudumbashree					
	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total	SD	D	NO	A	SA	
I have been denied opportunities on account of my gender	20	69.5	1.7	3.4	5.1	100	26.5	50	0	11.8	11.8	
Party will not allocate two consecutive terms for women	0	22	22	30.5	25.4	100	8.8	21	23.5	29.4	17.6	

Source: Fieldwork data; From optimistic Strongly Disagree to pessimistic Strongly Agree the options were given on a five-point scale.

Table 7.2.5

Satisfaction with Political positions (SD indicates extreme negative)

Statements	With Kudumbashree						Without Kudumbashree					
	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total	SD	D	NO	A	SA	
I am happy and content with the position in the party	0	6.8	0	13.6	79.7	100	8.8	0	0	17.6	73.5	
I never encountered gender discrimination within the party	11.9	27.1	1.7	23.7	35.6	100	11.8	5.9	0	44.1	38.2	
I've the confidence to win in a general seat	1.7	20.3	3.4	20.3	54.2	100	5.9	14.7	2.9	32.4	44.1	

Source: Fieldwork data; From pessimistic Strongly Disagree to optimistic Strongly Agree the options were given on a five-point scale.

The responses to statements in tables 7.2.4 and 7.2.5 that check if they had been subjected to gender discrimination within the party point out that, women are generally happy and grateful for the chances they were given. A good number of them believed they are here on account of their 'gender'. To quote a typical response, glorifying this as a generous favour from men instead of taking it as a handout meted out to women aimed to stop them from demanding their rightful share in upper layers of the political system, "*we got his opportunity only because of our gender. So, we cannot say that there is discrimination against us*" (Bimala, Kudumbashree group). Astonishingly even a woman with Kudumbashree background had failed to understand this as her 'right'. Another says, "*so far women get more than they deserved so we should be grateful to them*" (Ayesha, Non-Kudumbashree group). Here the woman who is visibly overwhelmed by the quantity of the seats assigned for women is praising the 'generosity' of men by saying women are getting a lot more attention than they really deserved on account of their 'gender'. She clearly does not take this as her constitutional 'right' instead prefers to take it as a 'generous gift' by men. From their responses, it is clear that women in those areas selected for this study tend to 'glorify' and celebrate the benevolent nature of men and they adopt feminism only if it is presented to them in a more 'conservative' way. A majority of them do not wish to challenge

their systematic exclusion from the position of power within their political parties as well as in the higher tiers of democratic institutions as long as they have right to “equality” at least in paper and are treated respectfully.

Except for a negligible few, the rest of them are contented, and they refuse to believe they are being discriminated on account of their gender. However, in reality, women are failing to realize they are not at the mercy of ‘men’ and they are being given a tiny portion of what they genuinely deserved. After all, men politicians and this system successfully stalled a proposal to ensure women’s reservation in upper layers of political power. During the focus group discussions where men and women sat together with the researcher to discuss the pros and cons of the reservation system, it was clear that both genders felt there is something amiss in this system. For example, one of the participants in an FGD says, *“this system is doing ‘injustice’ to men as we are outnumbered by women. They are free to contest in any seats including SC/ST reserved and general, whereas we get only a few seats. I feel so bad when I see men (who are actively involved in politics from their younger days and are capable of delivering) are being sidelined by women hijackers who are here only because they are ‘women’ and have influential spouses or fathers”* (Appachan, Key Informant). From this outburst, it is clear that there are men out there who believe women are hijacking positions of power from them while they keep ‘mum’ on the negligible percentage of women leaders in State assemblies, upper and lower houses of Parliaments who never accused men of stealing positions from them. Ironically, some women also take this as an ‘injustice’ to men and say they would happily walk away from general seats as they feel guilty of taking away seats from deserving men candidates. In contrast, there existed a few women who believed they are being discriminated on account of their gender. From the table 7.2.4, it is clear that 8.5% from Kudumbashree group and nearly 24% of the Non-Kudumbashree group believed they had faced some kind of gender discrimination within the party. Here, the group without Kudumbashree fared better than the other group. This could be because of Kudumbashree group consisted more of freshers rather than veterans as in Non-Kudumbashree group. Expressing her dissatisfaction, one of the veteran leaders said, *“though they made me a member more than once and an ardent party worker, I have strong reasons to believe I’ve been sidelined from major leadership positions in the party”* (Amala, Non-Kudumbashree group) Another respondent, who is a doctor by profession and an active politician since her childhood says, *“it is tough to break this glass ceiling, men do not allow us to grow*

after a particular level. It's my third term here in this panchayat, and I believe I am capable of moving on to the next level. And if everything goes well (read as, if women reservation bill gets passed or if another prominent party decides to put up a lady candidate in the byelection for Pala constituency), I will be contesting in Legislative assembly" (Anjita, Non-Kudumbashree). It must be noted that even when a woman talks about her dream of contesting, it accompanies with a lot of 'conditions'. In one of the focus group discussions where men teased women saying they lack both knowledge and skill to run the panchayat, women members unanimously objected them and blamed men's natural tendency to 'degrade' women's efforts. In addition to that, they felt men would never acknowledge or appreciate women's hard work even if it turned out to be an innovative and successful idea. Pointed out a woman member, *"sometimes, we help them to prepare beneficiary lists for different government schemes, and we used to spend hours to finish up their paperwork. See, what are we getting back?"* (Anitha, Non-Kudumbashree group)

The statement, *"Party, will not allocate two consecutive terms for women"*, in the table 7.2.4 examines respondents' opinion on political party's aversion to allocate two consecutive terms for a woman. Pointing out the differences in the attitude of the people around if a woman opts to contest repeatedly said a respondent, *"As for men, it is interesting to note that no one keeps a record of them. If a woman wants to contest in a particular seat for more than once, she suddenly becomes a power grabber or someone who never gives up the mighty chair to enjoy the benefits of power or someone who does not want to stay back at home and cook for her family any longer"* (Rekha, Non-Kudumbashree group). When a specific amount gets sanctioned for some projects, the experienced ones have a knack to convince the authorities to kick start those projects from their wards. By the time the work reaches other wards, the allocated fund dries out, and they will have to drop its implementation as such. One of the respondents shared her experience, *"I genuinely feel all women must be given a second term because they take a while to get adjusted with the system. For example, recently some amount has been sanctioned in our panchayat to install more street lights, and one of the influential male members wanted to start it from his ward, and he got away with his plan. In his ward, he made the contractor install them in every few yards, but when it finally reached in my ward the fund dried out, and we were forced to install them kilometres apart just for the sake of it. Now that I learned the trick, next time I will not allow this to happen"* (Anitha, Non-Kudumbashree group). From the table, it is clear that

nearly a quarter of both sets of respondents stick on to ‘no opinion’ as they prefer not to offend the party in which they are members. However, more than 55% of the Kudumbashree group and nearly 50% of the other group either "agree or strongly agree" to this statement which confirms the fact that there is reluctance from party leadership to allocate seats to women candidates consecutively if the seat falls under the general category even if influential leaders fail to acknowledge the existence of it.

The last statement in the table 7.2.5 examines if the respondent has the confidence to contest in a general seat. Interestingly, the total sample consists of all sorts of respondents including those who are ready to sacrifice their seats to male members and those who say that reservation or no reservation if one feels like contesting, she should contest. From the collected data, it is clear that those with Kudumbashree background show more confidence to contest in general seats and those without Kudumbashree prefer to stick on to reserved seats. Elucidated a respondent with Kudumbashree, *“reservation may help us to earn a seat for our very first time. If we fail to deliver, they will throw us out in the next election. In my case, I am confident that I would get reelected not because of my gender or my privileges, but of my hard work and dedication”* (Laisamma, Kudumbashree group)

Table 7.3, compares the answer they have given for the statement, *‘I will compromise with the party if I have to’* with their castes. The general category constitutes upper castes like Hindu Nair and Syrian/Orthodox Christians while SC/ST/OBC constitutes other castes like Ezhava, Pulaya, Hindu Vishwakarma, Cheramar, Harijan, Velladar and Muslim. From this comparison, it is evident that those who belonged to traditional upper-caste with no Kudumbashree exposure tend to be more submissive to political pressure than the other group.

Table 7.3 Caste Vs Willingness to Compromise with the Party

Caste	Response	Non-Kudumbashree	Kudumbashree
General	Strongly Disagree	1	8
	Disagree	3	18
	No opinion	9	0
	Agree	7	0
	Strongly Agree	9	2
	Strongly Disagree	0	4
SC/ST/OBC	Disagree	0	23
	No opinion	3	1
	Agree	0	1
	Strongly Agree	2	1
No Caste	Strongly disagree	0	1
Total		34	59

Source; fieldwork data

If one is to check the chronology that leads up to their political entry, it must be noted that a great majority of them have made use of their family's political alliance to reach where they are now. At the same time, those who have entered through Kudumbashree irrespective of their caste vociferously opposed the idea of giving up their 'political stand' under pressure. Therefore, it may well be argued that Kudumbashree is doing its bit to make women bolder and fearless. However, it should be noted that in both groups, there existed a few respondents who have had ties with other micro-financing groups or Vanitha samajams under their caste or religion. For example, while a few Nairs were actively involved in activities of Nair Service Society, many

from the caste Ezhavas were with Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalayana Yogam (SNDP). Likewise, Christians were participants of different organisations under their diocese. As stated in the theoretical framework, one cannot look past the contributions of such organisations towards making them socially active since Person-in-Environment theory views each individual as a product of his/her environment which constituted different sub-systems. This to and fro relations within and between all the subsystems around an individual should also be taken into consideration while discussing its ability to shape up his/her personality and vigour.

Table 7.4 The Extent of Political Participation (SD extreme negative)

Statements	With Kudumbashree						Without Kudumbashree					
	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total	SD	D	NO	A	SA	
I have the freedom to talk uninterruptedly in the meetings	0	3.4	0	25	71	100	2.9	38	0	0	58.8	
I have the capability to express my ideas	0	0	0	37	63	100	0	2.9	0	53	44.1	

Source: Filed work data; From pessimistic (Strongly Disagree) to optimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

Table 7.4 assess the respondents' ability to participate in committee meetings effectively. The first statement checks the respondent's freedom to talk uninterruptedly in the committee meetings. Such meetings are an integral part of the Panchayat's smooth functioning. All such meetings are headed by President or Vice President (in president's absence). This committee solely decides on all matters relevant to the functioning of the panchayat. In every panchayat where the researcher conducted her field study, women members were generally very happy with the time they get in those committees to present the matters concerned with their wards. While

a negligible few from the Kudumbashree group accepted that they do not have the freedom to talk uninterruptedly in meetings, a not so scanty 38% from Non- Kudumbashree group felt the same. In those panchayats where noisy committees are a norm, Non-Kudumbashree women were said to be quieter in comparison with the Kudumbashree empowered ones. Pointed out, a woman from the Kudumbashree group, *“I will say whatever I feel like saying, sometimes there would be attempts from others to discourage me. I don’t mind any of that. I am here to speak for the people who stood by me. I am their voice, and they are my strength”* (Reeba, Kudumbashree group).

In almost all focus group discussions where men members were asked to share their views on differences between Kudumbashree empowered women and Non-Kudumbashree ones, they immediately pointed out that most of the women from former are fearless speakers, and nothing stops them from being loud. One of the Key informants said on a lighter note, *“I don’t know much about Kudumbashree, but one thing I’m sure that, it helps to develop many tongues around one’s neck. They have no qualms to prevent others from talking, whereas most of the direct entrants wait patiently for their turn”* (Ali, Key Informant). The next statement checks if they are capable of expressing their ideas in the meetings. Except for a negligible few, almost everyone from the total sample felt that they were doing it effectively.

In every profession, mutual respect between colleagues ensures a great work environment wherein one could draw immense pleasure and satisfaction even when he/she has to work very hard. The mutual care and support not only increase one’s productivity but improves his/her quality of life also. When it comes to politics, the rivalry between different political parties is the usual norm. Members of the governing party and the opposition rarely get along. Within the committee hall of the panchayat, they may fight with each other, but outside they all keep good friendship with each other.

Table 7.5 The Confidence Scale (SD indicates extreme positive response)

Statements	With Kudumbashree						Without Kudumbashree					
	SD	D	NO	A	SA	Total	SD	D	NO	A	SA	
Male members enjoy the upper hand	0.0	54.2	0	11.9	27.1	100	8.8	50	5.9	11.8	23.5	
Faced difficulties to prove myself	5.1	52.5	0	11.9	30.5	100	5.9	58.8	0	20.6	14.7	
Male members often ignore my suggestions	13.6	54.2	0	13.6	18.6	100	11.8	61.8	0	5.9	20.6	

Source: Fieldwork data; From optimistic (Strongly Disagree) to pessimistic (Strongly Agree) the options were given on a five-point scale.

The data in the table above indicates that a good number of respondents, irrespective of their Kudumbashree background believe that they are not over-powered by their men colleagues in the committee as women are a strong force in almost all panchayat. In the words of a respondent, “Earlier the situation was much different as we were just 33% and we used to sit there quietly watching the proceedings in a manner that suited their narrative of typical ‘patriarchal’ women. Now they cannot ignore us anymore, after all, they are lesser in number, and we usually don’t shy away from those opportunities to make a big sound. Most of us communicate clearly and think out loudly no matter what” (Mincy, Kudumbashree group).

However, the percentage of women in each group who differ comes around a substantiate 35%. The researcher also felt the same when she interacted with the male members while conducting focus group discussions where some of them arrogantly said that most of the women members

were good for nothing and it was a mistake of the government to allow them to be a part of local governance. To quote one of such responses, *“We are already lesser in number and are forced to work extra hard to overcome the problems they (ignorant women members) are creating due to their inexperience in the field”* (Chacko, Key Informant). Due to such attitudes of certain male members, a good number of women feel that they are also forced to work extra hard to avoid such prejudices and to prove themselves. In fact, more than 40% of women with Kudumbashree and 35% of women without Kudumbashree “either agreed or strongly agreed” to the statement, “I had faced difficulties with proving myself”. If and when someone wanders into unknown territory, two things are said to be essential for its success, “confidence in oneself” and “the confidence of the people around him or her”. When a woman decides to contest, the first question she will be asked by the people around her, could be “Do you think you can manage it?” Questions like this surely have the potential to implant seeds of unsurety in the minds of women candidates even before they start out. Sometimes, people even approach them with a prejudiced mindset that grievance redressal would have been easier if it was a male member without realizing the fact that ‘gender’ of the member has no impact on deciding the fate of a complaint. However, there are people out there who believe men’s superiority over women. To avoid this, women work more, but their efforts go unnoticed as such people inherently believe in men’s superiority. From the table, it is clear that there is a gap between Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree women here. This could be because of Non-Kudumbashree group’s privileged background. Since, the latter group consisted of more educated, employed or with a powerful family, the people readily give them more respect.

Interestingly, one of the Non-Kudumbashree members who replaced her husband pointed out, *“when people approach me for help; they know that even if I don’t know ‘how’, my husband surely knows the way and advise me accordingly”* (Kuttiyamma, Non- Kudumbashree). However, things are not that easy with Kudumbashree members, as they themselves work their way up without much external help; they have to work harder to prove that they are capable and worthy. The next statement, “male members often ignore my suggestions” in the table checks if male members take them seriously or not. Here also, a substantial number of respondents felt their suggestions are valued and respected by male members except for 32.2% of respondents with Kudumbashree and 26.5% without Kudumbashree. Here also, as in the

case of the previous statement, Non- Kudumbashree group presented a better figure as their privileges might have worked in favour of them.

The analysis of the qualitative data indicates that a majority of them are confident that their increased number itself make a ‘difference’ in the local governance system as women are a strong force in almost all panchayats owing to the increased reservation cap. To find out if there is a statistically significant difference among the two groups the researcher conducted a Mann-Whitney U test on the total confidence score of the items in Scale 2.

Table 7.5.1
Ranks

	If the respondent has Kudumbashree exposure	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
	With Kudumbashree	59	48.31	2850.00
Total value for confidence				
	Without Kudumbashree	34	44.74	1521.00
	Total	93		

Table 7.5.2
Test Statistics Mann-Whitney U Test

	Total value for confidence
Mann-Whitney U	926.000
Wilcoxon W	1521.000
Z	-0.626
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.531
Grouping Variable: if the respondent has Kudumbashree exposure	

The test result gives a probability value (p), 0.531 which is greater than 0.05 implies there is no statistically significant difference between the confidence level of both groups. Women irrespective of their Kudumbashree background are confident on account of their increased

number in the local governance and proudly state the same. However, the qualitative interviews brought out layers of patriarchy buried deep underneath.

Table 7.6.1 Plans to Contest in Next Election

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	20.3	8	23.5
No	17	28.8	11	32.4
Unsure	30	50.8	15	44.1
Total	59	100	34	100

Source: Fieldwork data

The table 7.6.1 checks if the respondents are planning to contest in the next election. Here 20.3% of the Kudumbashree group and the 23.5% of the Non- Kudumbashree group were absolutely sure about their choice. They believed, they have a promising future in politics, and they already have their priorities clear in their mind as depicted in the table below 7.6.2. Out of those who have already made up their mind to contest, six from Kudumbashree group and three from Non-Kudumbashree group have opted for District Panchayat, and six others from Kudumbashree and five others from Non-Kudumbashree preferred to contest for a membership position in either Panchayat or block panchayat. While the Kudumbashree group had the least percentage of respondents who opted for a straight ‘NO’, the other group had less percentage of ‘unsure’ or ‘not decided yet’ category.

The second hypothesis coined for this study assumed “Kudumbashree inspires its participants to stay back in politics for a longer period”. Since the analysis of the qualitative data does not bring forth any evidence suggesting Kudumbashree empowered women were particularly interested in continuing their political career the researcher conducted a Mann- Whitney U test on their

responses to the statement “I am planning to contest in next election” to check if there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 7.6.1 (a) Ranks

	Kudumbashree exposure	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
I am planning to contest in next election	With Kudumbashree	59	46.91	2767.50
	Without Kudumbashree	34	47.16	1603.50
	Total	93		

Table:7.6.1 (b) Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statistics	
I am planning to contest in next election	
Mann-Whitney U	997.500
Wilcoxon W	2767.500
Z	-0.048
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.962
Grouping Variable: if the respondent has Kudumbashree exposure	

The test result gives a probability value (p), 0.962 which is greater than 0.05 and thus it can be concluded that women irrespective of their Kudumbashree background do not dream of climbing up the political ladder beyond a certain level.

Table 7.6.2 The Preferred Positions to Contest

	With Kudumbashree	Without Kudumbashree
	Frequency	Frequency
District Panchayat	6	3
Panchayat/ Block Panchayat	6	5
Total	12	8

Source: Fieldwork data

From, these two tables, it is clear that women irrespective of their Kudumbashree background do not dream of climbing up the political ladder beyond a certain level. None of the respondents except the one who opted for district panchayat here nurtures higher political ambitions. Her dream was to become a member of legislative assembly as quoted under table 7.2.4. But I have refrained from naming it here as she was not sure if her party takes a chance with a female contestant unless there is a constitutional reservation for women.

Table 7. 7 The Future Course of Action

	With Kudumbashree		Without Kudumbashree	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Aspiring to be a politician	15	25.4	12	35.3
Go back to my previous life	17	28.8	15	44.1
Political / Social Activist	18	30.5	3	8.8
Not Decided yet	9	15.3	4	11.8
Total	59	100	34	100

Source: Fieldwork data

This table above deals with the future plans of the respondents. The data suggests that 35.3% of Non-Kudumbashree women are looking forward to remaining as politicians, against Kudumbashree group's 25.4%. While 44.1% of the Non-Kudumbashree group desired to go back to their previous lives, Kudumbashree group had only 28.8% of such cases. Interestingly, a good number of respondents from Kudumbashree group prefer to be active in the socio-political arena after the end of their current term. A few of them remarked that they could not even imagine a life without doing social work as they had been so accustomed to it. To quote one of such response, "since, my Kudumbashree days I have been actively involving with social services and now that I am a member, I take this as an opportunity to expand my interests in social work. I made it a point that I do at least one 'help' daily so that I could sleep peacefully in the night" (Laisamma, Kudumbashree group). A few of them in the total sample were not sure about their future plans.

7.3 Case Studies

Every respondent had a unique story to tell about his/her political journey. They all took different paths to reach where they are now. While a few of them had a smooth journey all along on account of their privileges, the rest had a tricky path to travel due to different reasons. Therefore, the researcher feels that highlighting a few stories narrated by the respondents during the one-to-one interviews may enhance the depth and understanding of this study. Such narratives/case studies presented below (twelve case studies) are expected to bring forth an insight into women's way of tackling issues and handling political pressure in general. For those who have entered into politics through Kudumbashree, this journey is all about how and why this movement is so unique and close to their hearts, and for others, it is all about how their privileges ensured their 'survival' in this field.

Case 1

Mincy, who was 52 years old at the time of data collection and a first-time member in the Panchayat, is an example of how Kudumbashree brings forth an ordinary woman into political forefront. For some reason, she could not study beyond Matriculation, and that was her biggest regret even now. With no regular job or employability skills, she remained inside the four walls of her house like any other housewives in the area, bringing up her three children. However, her interest to grow organic vegetables had brought in some money to supplement her family's

income. When Kudumbashree started in her village, she became a member of it. Initially, her husband was not happy about it, but he started supporting her later on as he realized the benefits of Kudumbashree, such as easy access to government services and bank loans. Her growth chart in Kudumbashree moved up from an ordinary member to the Vice Chairperson of Community Development Society (CDS) for three years. In between, she served as the President of Area Development Society (ADS) for three years. The respondent explained that *“in fact, Kudumbashree made me what I am today. My decision to join in Kudumbashree was the biggest turning point of my life. This organization is like a big book of knowledge that enables the reader to grow personally and socially. As I moved from one chapter to the next, I picked up interesting information about every aspect of my life. By flipping through its pages, I picked up lessons on basic skills like visiting a bank or opening a savings bank account to complicated lessons in business management”*.

With the loan availed from Kudumbashree, she expanded her farming business further and bought property registered in her own name. More than financial empowerment, the respondent felt that Kudumbashree has been helping her to remain as a compassionate and humble human being willing to help women belong to backward communities. As the Vice- chairperson of CDS, she took a special interest in mobilizing women from backward communities and in instilling a saving habit among them. She is an eloquent speaker now thanks to all those opportunities to speak in public she has had during her Kudumbashree days. To quote her exact words, *“through Kudumbashree I finally found what I had been missing all along in my life i.e., ‘aarjavam’ roughly translated as ‘rectitude’ the ability to call a spade a spade”*.

For one who studies this particular member’s political entry, it is clear that she got an opportunity to enter into politics based on the image she acquired in society as a Kudumbashree leader as she or her husband had no political connections previously. Moreover, she chose to contest in a party that was newly formed at the time of elections under the local M.L.A who refused to support both ruling and the opposition party. Therefore, she believed, the people extended their support to her on account of her exemplary works as a Kudumbashree leader. During and after the election, her Kudumbashree colleagues had been a strong support for her. However, she is afraid that her lack of formal education may cut short her political dream. She clarified that *“though I have political ambitions and learned how to survive in this field, lack of higher education*

prevents me from nurturing it. I think I should not contest next time as I personally feel, it is important to have highly educated women in this field”.

Case 2

Anitha, aged 53, who was a direct entrant into the panchayat level politics, had a different story to tell. Her political entry was smooth as she belonged to a prominent family in the Panchayat and her father in law served as the Mandalam (local) committee president of a political party. Regarding her political entry, she elucidated that, *“at a time when political parties suddenly started hunting for right women candidates, as a result of mandatory reservation policy, they took note of me as my father in law was a prominent leader in this party previously and they talked the matter to me. After a discussion with my family members, I agreed. Else who will remember us ‘women’? And since then, I have been working as an active politician. After my stint as a Block Panchayat member, I got elected in Panchayat as well. In between, I’ve completed a term in our Co-operative bank also as a director board member”.*

Her first stint, as a member of block panchayat, was from 2010- 2015, until then she was an ordinary housewife with no income of her own. However, in the next election, she chose to contest in Gram Panchayat from an electoral ward that was not her home turf. When the researcher met her for the first time, she was the standing committee chairperson of Health and Education, and during the period of this study itself, she got appointed as Vice President of the panchayat for the rest of the term. Though she had a smooth entry into politics, she struggled hard to survive in this field with her limited political experience. When she had started as a public figure, she had no idea about the functioning of Panchayat or block panchayat. She had to get familiarize herself with all the jargons using in the panchayat. From panchayat planning to chair a meeting, she had to learn everything from scratch. As she was educated and was determined to overcome the hurdles on her ‘own’ she spent hours reading training manuals and handbooks by KILA. More than political leaders she depended upon panchayat administration staff to clarify her doubts. She illustrated that *“based on my experience I suggest, every woman should work in a Kudumbashree like organization for a certain period of time before getting into politics. I noticed such women have better knowledge about meetings, how to debate constructively, panchayat planning and preparing minutes. Moreover, they all know about ‘Gram Sabha’ meetings as most of them had participated in a few before they got elected into Panchayat. Most*

of them have attended many classes related to women empowerment and gender equality on account of which they all are seemingly bold and confident. I've never seen them shying away from expressing their views. To be frank, before getting into all this, I had no idea about any of these things. I believe the case is the same with most of the members like me who entered into this space directly. I have seen many such became proxies for their husbands or party leaders. Therefore, I believe, experience with such groups would help women leaders to survive with dignity in this field".

Based on her experience she listed out certain problems faced by women in this field like unsuitable working hours, unavailability of reserved seats in one's own ward, resistance from either spouse or a family member and the like. In her case, when she was compelled to shift to another ward in the Panchayat, it was tough for her to reach every nook and corner of the ward for campaigning. *"During campaign time, I wished I had Kudumbashree comrades around to help me with door to door campaigning. All the time I had to depend on party colleagues".* As per her view, regarding women's participation in committee meetings, the gender difference does not make much difference. In committee meetings, the ruling party stays together while opposition makes noise usually. In her words, *"however, I could say that those women who have come through Kudumbashree usually take an active role in attacking the ruling party while the other group (those who entered directly) sit quietly".* Though the work she has been doing since the beginning of her political life is gratifying, she plans to quit it after the current term as her ageing mother-in-law requires her constant attention. She exemplified that, *"keeping work-life balance may be easier for those who don't take this as a serious job. But for me, if I do something, I'll always put in my 100% effort. Moreover, I feel like I should pave the way for someone young who knows computer."*

Case 3

Having been married into a prominent political family of the panchayat, entry into the politics has been very easy and smooth for this 53-year-old ward member Valsala. Her husband, the president of the Service Co-operative bank, is one of the prominent political leaders of Kerala Congress in the area. In the Panchayat election, her husband and other party members considering her winnability had compelled her to stand for election. Obviously, she has had no political exposure until then as a political worker. She had neither done a public speaking nor

visited a Panchayat office. During election campaigning, she got introduced to people with the identity of her husband as a political leader in the area as she was not a familiar face to them. Since she had never handled leadership positions of any sort, it was extremely tough for her to ‘chair’ a meeting and to address a gathering. However, gradually she picked up and now she is able to talk a few sentences in public. Even now, the majority recognize her as the wife of a political leader in the locality. However, when a Kudumbashree member enters into the political field, most probably everyone would recognize her in own label as her identity is familiar to her Kudumbashree colleagues at least. She added that *“in the case of a Kudumbashree member it is always the other way around. The chances are high that their husbands are being recognized by others as ‘husband of CDS chairperson or ADS president and so on.’”*

About the increase in her respectability inside her own house after the election, she says, *“surely, there is an increase in my status in the family, as everyone started asking for my advice as well in all matters but I never take this as an excuse for not doing my daily household chores. I do them all and go out to get panchayat works done.”* She believes women should not ask for general seats as their number already exceeds males’ in almost all panchayats. According to her, having a strong political connection through one’s husband is, in fact, a burden which may derail one’s political journey as she had been subjected to many allegations connected with her husband. Pointing out the commendable difference between herself and Kudumbashree trained members, she explained that *“though I and my husband, do noticeable work for the general public without expecting anything in return, people allege that we are making a lot of money illegally as both of us are in politics. Initially, such comments were affecting me very badly, but now I’ve learnt not to pay heed to such baseless things. That’s why I would say it is easier for women who come to politics without apparent political connection. People are easy on them by giving consecutive opportunities, especially those who have come through Kudumbashree. But in my case, people say we are behaving as if panchayat is our family’s monopoly. Moreover, I find it is very difficult to campaign and walk around the ward so I may not contest in the next election”*.

Case 4

The following case proves that a prolonged period of Kudumbashree exposure is essential to make any positive impact in one’s life. Sunandha, aged 39 at the time of interview joined

Kudumbashree a few months before the panchayat election she contested, and she did not hold any leadership positions with it. Since she was working as an office assistant and had been busy juggling between family and work, she skipped some of the weekly meetings of Kudumbashree as well. Therefore, she says *“like, other ladies who work with Kudumbashree, I neither got any opportunities to visit a panchayat nor to address a gathering. However, I am happy that this in fact gave me an opportunity to meet with a few people in the locality with whom I failed to keep up regular contacts because of my busy schedule. I believe this helped me a lot while campaigning”*.

She decided to join politics as her husband; a very active politician in the area compelled her to do so. She is in favour of making compromises with the party in case there arises any difference in their opinion since she believes that it is her duty to be obliged to the party which offered her the seat. The participant believes that we need a considerable term of experience with Kudumbashree both as a member and a leader so as to be self-reliant in making decisions and taking the lead role in politics. She explains that *“If I could work as a fulltime leader with the Kudumbashree, I would be much more suited with this Member of Panchayat position, with better leadership skills such as public speaking, decision making, organizing and the like, than now”*.

Case 5

In one of their studies Williams et al., (2015) feared that Kudumbashree also might end up as just another lip service scheme whose purpose is to ‘enhance’ women’s capabilities a little more, but within the limit permissible by the existing ‘patriarchal’ framework despite having a strong vision and motto unless there are women who utilize their agency beyond those cultural limits. This case of a 55 years old Theresa underlines such a fear. Hinting the same, the respondent says, *“it is true that Kudumbashree has given us the wings to fly, but we are not interested in flying like a kite with an untied string. Sanskari women should allow her husband or a male caretaker to hold the other end of the string safely”*. Though she is a public figure, she is hesitant to break the gender stereotypes set by society and wants to be known as one subordinated to her husband. She elucidated that, *“I don’t want to be known as a ‘maramkeri’; a lady follows her likes rather than husband’s”*.

After her marriage, she became a 'common' housewife and was leading a normal life as a homemaker until she becomes a Kudumbashree member. This has become a turning point in her life. Gradually she became active in social work and in politics. She became a member of 'mandalam committee' of Congress party also. According to her, Kudumbashree brought out the best in her by giving her opportunities to take part in social movements and protests. It helped her not only to develop her overall personality but also instilled qualities of management in her. She started working as a resource person in Kudumbashree organized seminars. Conducting awareness classes on the dangers of alcoholism is her forte now.

When she had a major discord with the political party a few years back, she had to face the election as an independent candidate. During that difficult time, Kudumbashree members rallied behind her strongly, and she won easily without the party's help. In spite of the strong social support, she receives through Kudumbashree and her image as a strong personality, she wants to follow the norms associated with gender labels in society. For that reason, she wants to go up the political ladder only if her husband wants her to. The current one is her fourth term as the member of the panchayat, but she reiterated that *"for me, the last word for everything is my husband, he writes me my speeches and tells me what to do"*.

Case 6

When someone has everything served on a platter as a result of his/her privileges, the chances are high that he/she may undermine the capability of someone who made it from scratch. This case of a 59 years old member Rekha who is politically well connected and from a well-known family highlights the same. Her husband is the state-level secretary of the party in which she is a member. In addition to that, he is the director board member/President of multiple co-operative institutions. Currently, she is serving her second tenure in the panchayat as a member. Previously, she had served as the president of this Panchayat for three years during her first tenure. She was brought up in a politically well-connected and financially sound family. During her growing up years, she had preferred to go along with the political views of the family and never felt the need of questioning any of the 'choices' she has been given. Later, when she got married to a full-time politician, she too became very active in the political field. From campaigning for her husband to a candidate herself, she had an amazing journey so far. As her husband moved from local politics to higher levels, she took this decision to carry on his good

work in the ward level after being compelled by her party Chairman himself. Since she was active in the women's wing of the party, she had not faced any problems with public speaking or interacting with others. Though she was not familiar with the functioning of panchayat when she became the president immediately after her first election, she had her husband, who was also a president previously beside her to help and guide. She says, *"wherever I go, I will meet someone who knows my husband, and they will help me out"*. However, when it comes to Kudumbashree women, she has some interesting observations to make. While she agreed that Kudumbashree is, in fact, help women to improve their social connection and to get rid of their stage fright, she has disagreed this organization help women to carry out duties as a panchayat member/president once they are elected to the panchayat. *"I am not sure how it is going to help them. I would say these Kudumbashree women are 'overconfident' and noisy. Apart from making loud noises in the committee, I don't think they work any better than us, but if they recruit women with a decent education, I would happily welcome them"*. As per her views, becoming a president/member neither changed her social status nor improved her respectability as she had been respected by others even before on account of her privileges.

Case 7

The following case study highlights the capability of Kudumbashree once again to make a difference in the lives of ordinary women. Jincy, a 46 years old member who was born and brought up in an ordinary family, had to discontinue her studies after intermediate. After marriage, she got settled in this village. However, she was not financially dependent on her husband as she was working in a small-scale tailoring unit. In 2003 she became a Kudumbashree member, and since then she has been actively involving in the public matters of her village.

Kudumbashree opened a new world to her by reframing her view of the world around, she explained. *"Earlier I used to think only about my dear one's welfare. Once, I started my journey with Kudumbashree, I came to know that, there are people out there who suffer more than us in different ways."* The participant had a give and take relationship with the organization, she described. It helped her to grow as a more sensitive and caring person and most importantly, it allowed her to mingle with others. She served as the secretary of the group for many years and a CDS member for nine years. *"When I look back, considering my modest family surrounding and education, that was indeed a proud and defining period in my life. For the first time in my*

life, I said a few sentences standing in front of a few people. That itself was the biggest take away from my Kudumbashree experience”.

As a Kudumbashree member, she assisted all the previous ward members to conduct many programmes in her ward. She came into politics without apparent political connections within the family. So, she believes the local party leaders considering her commendable performance as a Kudumbashree leader had recruited her. *“I am sure that, they made me the chairperson of welfare committee chairperson after seeing my good work as a Kudumbashree leader”.* According to the respondent, Kudumbashree trained women have extraordinary perseverance to take up challenges on their own without being compelled while women having no Kudumbashree background prefer to stay ‘mum’ whenever there are discussions on sharing power. *“We demand our rightful share in the power; different standing committee chairmanship, therefore some of our colleagues call us ‘a noisy bunch’.”* She does not believe in restricting women to reserved seats. She argued that women should strongly demand general seats. *“There is nothing wrong in that, after all, we too are as hardworking and dedicated as gents”.* However, she prefers to go in sync with the party leadership though she shares her viewpoint with concerned leaders. She made clear that *“I will definitely let them know why I think differently, but before telling I would certainly go through its pros and cons”.*

Case 8

The following case study is an example of how Kudumbashree instils a genuine desire among women to be the change agents in society. Suja, aged 49, has been an active Kudumbashree worker since 2008 and was the president of her group, Haritha for three years. She was born and brought up in a BPL family and had not been able to continue her studies after intermediate, though she was a bright student at school. She is an Asha worker and is working under NREGA also.

The participant made clear that Kudumbashree is the platform that changed her life by making her a socially competent person. It empowered her to organize people and make visits to administrative as well as service centres such as police stations and panchayat office, she narrated. *“I was so afraid of talking to strangers or to police. I became bold enough to organize protests demanding time-bound release salaries for NREGA workers.”* Her journey to the position of a panchayat member is a true example of a woman as a change agent. She is settled

in one of the interior villages in her Panchayat which has no proper road connectivity. As an active Kudumbashree member and an Asha worker, she has to visit the Panchayat office and other offices regularly. It was taking almost one and a half hours to reach her workplace by walk, which is the only possible way for her. Though for many years the people in her village have been fighting for basic amenities like road connectivity and public transportation, none of the elected representatives of her ward did anything to resolve their problems. Therefore, when the panchayat election announced she felt it was her turn to realize her dreams by becoming a part of the panchayat administration, and she decided to contest. *“Fed up with the negligence of authorities I decided to become a change agent myself as I wanted to see what is stopping authorities from fulfilling a rightful demand of ours by becoming a part of them”*. As a member of the panchayat, she identified that the lack of fund for development in the panchayat and unwillingness of contractors are the barriers for the development of her locality. However, she is determined to overcome the hurdles for the welfare of the people in her neighbourhood.

Case 9

This case of a member Aparna, who came into politics via Kudumbashree, is an answer for many, who believe general seats are not for women and they are not worthy of putting up against men. She is in her second tenure currently and 58 years old as of May 2018. She belongs to a BPL family, and her husband is unemployed. She has been an active Kudumbashree member since its inception in her panchayat in 2002. She was the Secretary of her Neighbourhood Group (NHG) for ten long years.

The respondent stated that Kudumbashree acted as the springboard for her in order to grow as a public figure and to enter into politics. She explained that *“it brought me out of my kitchen to mainstream”*. Though the easy availability of bank loans attracted her towards this organization, gradually her social circle expanded and she became financially secured. *“Initially, I thought of joining in the group thinking that it may facilitate to get loans but once joined, it became an inevitable part of my life.”* When she was the secretary of NHG, Kudumbashree organized anti beverages movements against the state government under her leadership. She is absolutely proud of her growth from a person who was scared of public speaking to someone who delivers training classes to party colleagues, and she believes Kudumbashree made this transition possible. She described that *“I got many opportunities to go out and meet up with my colleagues in*

Kudumbashree and to organize meetings and address people as well.” Even though she had no political background or influential politicians at her home to support, she decided to contest independently from a reserved seat in 2010 to help underprivileged. For the next election in 2015, when this seat was not available for reserved category, she confidently stated that she would contest in the general seat against men. There were four male opponents, and this did not bother her in any way. As a matter of fact, this member is a counter to our male-centric societal norm that general seats are just for men and ladies are no way capable of winning an election over men. According to the member, there were two factors that made her confident of contesting in a general seat. Firstly, the support of Kudumbashree members regardless of the political party she chose to go with and secondly, her performance as a member of that Panchayat during her first tenure, which are applauded by the people. She explicated that *“I went ahead confidently to contest against four male candidates and won the election.”*

Case 10

For some, political entry may be easy, but when it comes to survival in this field, they may fumble. This case of a 61 years old member proves Kudumbashree is a failure for those who do not work in it for longer period. This member Josy, was born and brought up in an upper-middle-class family and had a very conservative upbringing. Therefore, after her graduation, she got married and settled down in this Panchayat. Remembering her younger days, she said, *“my family was one of the prominent families in the area, and so the women in the family were not expected to go out to work”*.

Since all other ladies joined Kudumbashree in their neighbourhood, she too took membership in the year 2005, but she stayed there as a passive member as her family was not in need of any benefits of Kudumbashree project. In a year after her joining to Kudumbashree, she contested in the Panchayat election and got elected. During election campaigns, public speaking was really a nightmare for her. Moreover, she struggled without knowing the roles and responsibilities of a member and the ways to carry out them once she got elected. These crises made her understand the real personal benefits of being an active Kudumbashree member. She reiterated that long term Kudumbashree experience is a strong base to perform well as a member of Panchayat. In furtherance, she narrated that, *“while seeing the panchayat members with excellent*

Kudumbashree experience doing their works with dignity, I regretted for not being an active member.”

However, she agreed that though she was a silent member, the Kudumbashree membership provided her with a strong vote base in the election since members of Kudumbashree stay united for their colleagues regardless of their political inclinations. She explained that *“despite the fact I contested as an independent candidate against the party in which I was a member before, I won comfortably as Kudumbashree colleagues remained with me.”* Nevertheless, she is not interested in pursuing politics further even if she got accustomed to her position in the panchayat and effectively managing all her responsibilities. She opined that to survive in the political field we must be silver-tongued; in other words, one must have a gift of gab which Kudumbashree members acquire through their experience, she elucidated. *“this profession is for those who have 'tongues all-around their neck' which means being eloquent, and the best way to develop this quality is working with Kudumbashree”,* she concluded.

Case 11

During this study, the researcher came across cases with inherited privileges that they are not in need of the support of any other organization such as Kudumbashree so as to enter into politics. A 48 years old member Amala, who was born and brought up in a family with many politicians as members of it and for that reason, politics was not an odd field for her. Based on her politically active fathers' insistence, she started her political career with Balasabha, the children's wing of her party. Highlighting the importance of working with a political party over a considerable period in order to grow into a strong political leader who handles leadership positions effectively, she stated that *“for me, party workers did all the campaigning and if you have party support, I don't think you need support from any other organizations”*. Eventually, she denied the merit in Kudumbashree's claim that it encourages women to be politicians that she affirmed that *“as far as I know they don't engage in political discussions during their weekly meetings.”*

However, she admitted the advantages of the wide social support system which Kudumbashree based Panchayat members are benefited with and the full-time assistance from their colleagues; moreover, they are familiar faces for the locals. She said that *“I missed the kind of support or camaraderie among Kudumbashree members during my campaign days’* and she added that *“I had to work hard to develop my vote base along with my party members to make sure that I won*

comfortably as I was not a familiar face outside the party cadres". Another aspect she mentioned is public speaking skill. Though she had delivered speeches right from her childhood she felt the speeches during the election campaign as a totally different one, and she explained, "While delivering a speech during the campaign, I literally went blank on the stage." Even so, she could overcome the hurdles with the help of senior party leaders.

On the contrary, she shared the view that Kudumbashree members are not much bothered about what they say so that they talk fluently anywhere. She criticized that *"though Kudumbashree members do not face any fear in facing a gathering, they are ignorant of political viewpoints that their speeches lack content, but they just talk whatever comes into their mind"*. Besides, she expressed that she never visited a panchayat office previous to the election she faced first, but KILA training and her commitment to her work helped her to overcome her initial troubles to a certain extent. While accepting the fact that Kudumbashree members make regular visits to Panchayat she is sceptical about their knowledge about the functioning of Panchayat. She asserted that *"just a visit to Panchayat for any of our need will not make anyone fit to hold a position in Panchayat administration."*

It was her own decision to contest in the election when she got an opportunity. She got elected in 2005 for the first time, and since then she has been serving the panchayat in different positions such as President, Vice president and a member. Out of the three terms she contested, two were from the seats reserved for women. Nonetheless, her journey over 15 years in the Panchayat has not been smooth. She had encountered many problems on her way, including gender discrimination. She pointed out that *"in party or panchayat meetings opinions of a woman leader do not draw as much attention as that of a male member even if he is a new member."* She substantiated the view that women have to struggle to survive in the political field due to the ill effects of age-old patriarchy and she suggested that better constitutional reservation is necessary for women's political empowerment and it is high time to expand it to higher tiers as well.

Case 12

Interview with a 44-year-old member Binu is worth mentioning here since she elucidated well about Kudumbashree's capability in training women leaders before taking up the job of a panchayat member. This member is a post-graduate with B.Ed and has been employed with a private school. She is in her second tenure presently and has been a member of Kudumbashree

for the last 18 years. In her opinion, Kudumbashree is a successful initiative that brought women out of their shells to the outer world and provided a platform to share their views and ideas for their empowerment. She described that *“I can proudly say that we the women collectively changed our lifestyle itself to accommodate Kudumbashree”*. As weekly meetings are inevitable in the functioning of Kudumbashree, it made women get out of their houses and get involved in the activities of this organization. Though it enhanced the saving habits of women, Kudumbashree has to adopt better measures to promote financial independence among women, she opined.

According to her, Kudumbashree is a wonderful platform that promotes the personality development and sociability of women by providing opportunities to meet up` colleagues, to conduct meetings, to visit government offices and the like. Indeed, it expands the social networks of women and boosts their public speaking skills, the two things which are fundamental to the role of a panchayat member, she explained. *“When Kudumbashree conducts weekly meetings in one of its member’s house, the host is supposed to say a welcome speech and the woman who agrees to conduct next meeting in her house would be saying the valedictory speech.”*

As a Kudumbashree member, she used to work in close association with then ward member, and she was a resource person for people’s planning initiative. She used to do her best to coordinate Gram Sabha meetings as well. Therefore, when she got elected as the member of the panchayat, it was a cakewalk for her, and the party entrusted her with the position of vice president in her first term itself. Remembering those days, she emphasized that *“as the vice president of the panchayat, I prepared many development plans for the panchayat even though all credits were taken by the then president.”* She contested from a reserved seat in the first term, but in the second term, her contest was from a general seat and she won that too comfortably.

7.4 Conclusion

As envisaged in the introduction, this chapter elaborately discussed the way women members turned around their lives after being elected as people’s representatives at Panchayats. Someone who looks at their political career from a distance may feel that there is nothing changed about their lives apart from the fact that they have to attend committee meetings once in a while. However, if one is to observe and talk to them for a few minutes, it is evident that this opportunity

had indeed changed their lives forever especially of those who have come through Kudumbashree after living as a stay-at-home mothers for so long. From the way, they had talked about it so passionately and the excitement they showed when they said their opinions too are mattered or valued in the family and society, it is evident that a good percentage of them experienced an improvement in their self-esteem and confidence. For Kudumbashree empowered ones, this growth was seemed to be steeper as it caused a sudden jump in their social status and respectability. From the data, it is clear that Kudumbashree women use this opportunity to boost up their social mobility further. The data in this chapter also points out the fact that the Kudumbashree's role cannot be limited as a government venture that offers easy loans to women for consumption purposes as it produced a few amazing and influential women leaders in the panchayat level politics. However, the analysis revealed certain flaws in the current system as well. For instance, a few women, still believe and behave as 'keepers of patriarchal values' by degrading their own efforts and accepting that they are lesser beings by not challenging some of the allegations raised by the male members during focus group interviews. Though Kudumbashree women exhibited a bit more resilience and endurance than Non-Kudumbashree women, they all seemed to be struggling when it comes to climbing up the political ladder further. The following chapter deals with the major findings, limitations and suggestions.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study, “Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in politically empowering women in Kottayam District of Kerala”, with a transformative world view, adopted an embedded design in collecting, analysing and interpreting data. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been used to conclude and while writing the researcher conjoined them together in such a way that one completes the other. Both one-to-one case study interviews and focused group discussions have also been conducted to develop a deep understanding of different aspects of the respondent’s lives. Kottayam district is divided into 11 block panchayats, therefore, the researcher selected one panchayat each from all the blocks using ‘random sampling’ (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013) method and identified all women elected representatives in those panchayats. They formed the basis of the sample.

8.2 Socio-demographic Details of the Respondents

The respondents were elected women representatives of selected panchayats in Kottayam district of Kerala. Out of the total 93 women interviewed, 59 had Kudumbashree exposure previously, and the rest had entered into the Panchayat level politics directly. Irrespective of their Kudumbashree background, there were only 18 respondents below 40 years in the total sample, which is equal to a dismal 19.3%. While young mothers preferred to stay away from political glare on account of their school-going children, those who were above 61 years old and above-cited increasing health ailments as a reason for their preference to stay away from politics. The data emphasizes women’s tendency to be politically active, during their middle ages, “above 41 and below 60 years” when they are comparatively in better health and relatively free from child care responsibilities. While the Kudumbashree group had 74.58% under this category, the other had 70.59%.

When it comes to the religious composition of the respondents, the percentage of Christians (49.46%) in the total sample slightly exceeded the percentage of Hindus (48.38%). However, the percentage of Muslims in the total sample found to be negligibly small (2.1%). Since the caste system still plays a dominant role in determining one's status in society, the researcher looked into the composition of different castes in the total sample. The majority in the total sample (60%) belonged to the general category, followed by 38.7% of SC/ST/OBCs. Interestingly, a sole respondent proudly announced that she had no caste and has been bringing up her children also in the same way. The overall educational status of the respondents presents an optimistic figure, as there were none without basic literacy skills. In the total sample, 35.48% were graduates, 31% were intermediates, 30% were with high school education and 3 % were post-graduates. Considering the employment status, 43% of the total respondents were homemakers, 35.48 % were employed, and 21.5 % were self-employed. Among the respondents, there were four Asha workers and an NREGA worker as well. When it comes to the family type, the percentage of respondents from the joint family slightly exceeded than that of the nuclear family, which can be seen as an argument that supports women's tendency to be active in the political sphere if they have a supportive family at home. The percentage of the single-parent family stood at 9.68 % in the total sample. Economic status also plays a vital role in determining one's social status and power in society. It is observed that, with or without Kudumbashree, candidates belonged to APL had a strong presence here as they constitute 69.89% of the total sample.

8.3 Summary of Findings

The researcher tried her best to develop a deep understanding of different aspects of their political career in addition to their lives and livelihood before becoming elected representatives in the Panchayats. The study primarily focused on their "stories of survival" in a field from where they had been kept away for a long period of time, with special emphasis on how Kudumbashree inspired them to be politically active and socially vibrant. The section below summarizes the findings of the study.

8.3.1 The transformation of women from politically invisible entities to visible and robust political entities after the implementation of women reservation in Panchayats.

Women's political invisibility has been a matter of concern among modern-day political experts. This section analyzes women reservation act's impact on women's invisibility in the selected panchayats of Kottayam district in Kerala. The major effects of political invisibility analyzed under this objective were women's minimal presence in PRIs, tendency to avoid leadership positions in the party and their tendency to remain as just "voters" before implementing Panchayati Raj Act.

From the conversation with the respondents irrespective of their Kudumbashree background it is found that a majority of them had never dreamed of becoming a politician and they were happy to limit their political participation to just 'voting'. Because they always believed politics was for powerful men and they were seemingly happy with the subordinate position attributed to them over the centuries. The key informant interviews also revealed the same. According to a key informant who decorates a powerful position in the District Congress Committee of Kottayam, *"women tend to label party work as a 'headache' and an 'unnecessary' liability in addition to their household duties. Therefore, they prefer to stay back behind the curtains as 'voters' especially before this law. Now the situation is little better as many of them are willing to take up party positions as well. But whenever their term ends in the panchayat, they discontinue their party work as well"* (Jo, Key Informant).

While analyzing individual, social and political aspects of their lives before starting out as public servants, it is found that 60% of the respondents with Kudumbashree and nearly 80% of the respondents without it had never been approached by any political party or group previously with a political opportunity. From their responses, it is clear that, except a few, none of them had been brought up to be politicians in the future and would not have become one if there was no reservation. It is evident from the fact that the majority (90%) of the women who entered into politics later in their lives were not exposed to campus/school level politics. However, the passage of the Panchayati Raj Act had placed 'women', right in the centre of the political spectrum and its transformative effects started appearing in all walks of their lives. Not so surprisingly, nearly 85% of the total respondents believed, that they would not be considered for candidature with no reservation.

The most visible effect is the increase in the number of women who are willing to take part in political activities other than “voting”. Numerically speaking, women’s presence had been doubled or tripled in all PRIs after the implementation of Panchayati Raj. Eventually, the percentage of reserved seats increased up to 50%, from the initial 33% which in turn helped women to either equal or outnumber men in all the panchayats. Data points out that 8.6% of the total sample has courageously contested and won the general seats against men opponents. A sharp increase in the women elected representatives in panchayats led to an increased surge in the number of women who are willing to adorn leadership positions at party level also. However, they tend to resign from party responsibilities if and when they decide to discontinue contesting in Panchayat. The party leadership recruits some of those women elected representatives who have won under their flag in PRIs to their executive committees and boast off their commitment towards the cause of women’s political empowerment. When the researcher had interacted with a woman member who has been in the district committee of her political party pointed out that, out of 13 members in the core committee, she was the only female. The situation is not different for other political parties as well. Though the parties expressed their commitment towards increasing women’s presence in their core committees, by declaring 20 to 30% reservation, none of them has, in fact, this many women leaders under their belt. According to a key informant, though they failed to appoint 30% women leaders as suggested by their party chief, they managed to induct at least 20% of them as elected women representatives of PRIs sometimes willingly take up positions in the party. He further pointed out that difference in percentage cannot be shown as a failure of their (top leadership’s) commitment as women themselves have many ‘reservations’ before becoming active within the party leadership. In their families also, they get less acceptance if they decided to be active within the party cadres.

From the collected data, it is found that the ‘women reservation act’ in Panchayat has played an important role in drastically improving women’s political “visibility”. They outnumbered men in many Panchayats and have started contesting in general seats. In the case of women’s presence in political party’s leadership positions as well, the situation is not as bad as twenty years ago. The below figure explains the effect of the Panchayati Raj Act on ‘women’s political invisibility’ and its effects.

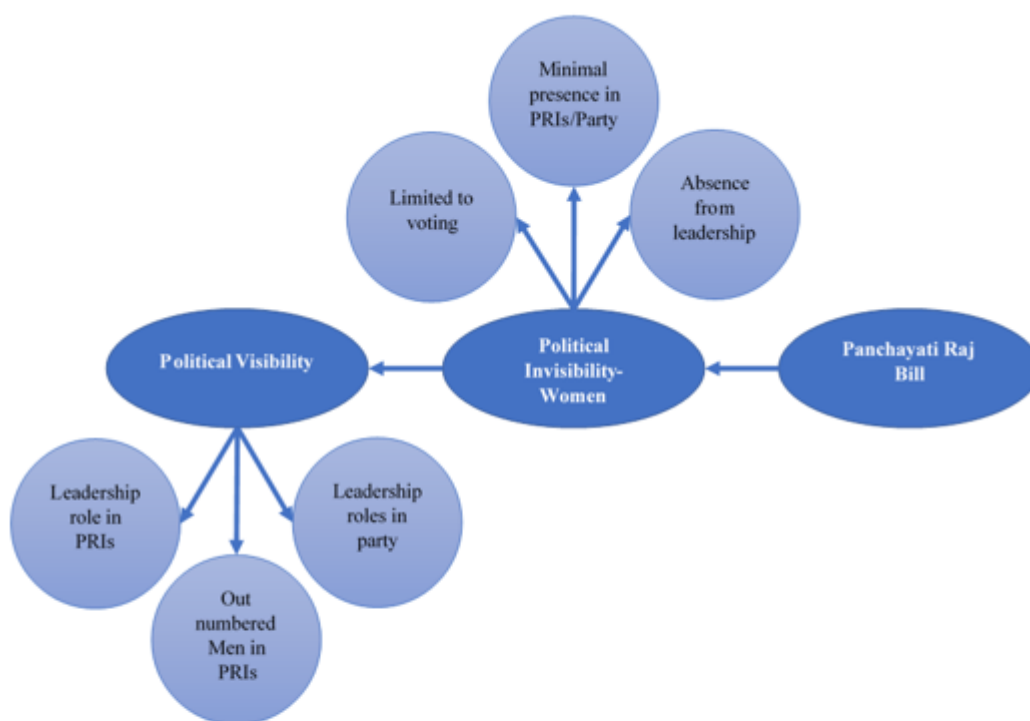


Figure 8.3.1

Impact of Panchayati Raj Act on Women's Political Invisibility

8.3.2 Kudumbashree's role as a facilitator, that promotes entry of women from lower socio-economic strata into political forefront.

From the socio-demographic analysis, it is clear that the number of respondents from the so-called 'elite' classes exceeded the number of respondents from lower socio-economic strata of the society as 60% of them belonged to 'general' category. If not for Kudumbashree, even fewer women from lower socio-economic strata would have entered into this field which could have been potentially affirmed 'the fear' that reservation would help only elite women. From the discussions in chapter V under table 5.5, it is clear that Kudumbashree brought in

50.8 % of SC/ST/OBC women to Panchayat level politics against Non-Kudumbashree's nominal 14.7% which means, only five women from Non-Kudumbashree group have made it to the Panchayat out of a possible 34 seats. In addition, of all the thirty-six SC/ST/OBC entrants thirty-one of them belonged to Kudumbashree group which is 86.1% and it further underlines Kudumbashree's importance.

Considering the educational status of the respondents, while the group without Kudumbashree experience consisted of the maximum number of educated women with 20 of the total 34 (58.82%) were, either graduates or postgraduates, the Kudumbashree group had just around 26% of them. However, the data suggests that their lack of education had not affected their social visibility as 75% of them have been leading an active social life even before entering into politics. At the same time, more than 47% of Non-Kudumbashree group were homemakers prior to their political entry despite having a good education. Still, Kudumbashree is being slammed by a few, for its capacity to bring forth women with limited education to political power. As long as it paves the way for strong-willed women leaders who have more social visibility and willingness to do hard work, such doubts should be considered as irrelevant. The data clarifies that those who have come through Kudumbashree can be considered as empowered ones as they were not as 'invisible' as their Non-Kudumbashree counterparts though they were the ones with lesser education. This, in fact, corroborates the idea of empowerment by Lucita Lazao that equates the empowerment to *"a journey from silence to articulation, from invisibility to recognition and from isolation to organisation"* (1995:34).

As pointed out earlier, the economic status of the family plays a vital role in determining one's social status. Theoretically, Kudumbashree embraces women from all strata of society, especially those who are poor and marginalized. Primarily it is a programme that brings together women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds by recognizing their ability to be "change agents" not only in their houses but in the society as well. When it comes to BPL respondents, 26 out of the 28 respondents were members of Kudumbashree which is equal to a whopping 92.86%. Without Kudumbashree, just 2 BPL women made it through. It must be noted that 59.3% from Kudumbashree group said they were financially independent before entering into Politics, out of which 50.8% had been earning below Rs.10,000/- (ten thousand) only per month. In the case of Non- Kudumbashree group, out of the 34 respondents, precisely

50% of them said they were financially independent before entering into politics, with 58.82% of them earning above Rs.10,001/- (ten thousand and one) but below Rs 20,000/- (twenty thousand) only and 11.76% earning above Rs.20,001/- (twenty thousand and one) and the rest were earning less than ten thousand only per month. It must be noted that the number of respondents who earn at least a minimum amount monthly, is higher in the Kudumbashree group as it constitutes women who run small scale businesses like tailoring units, tea shops, soap manufacturing, organic farming and the like with loans availed from their respective Kudumbashree units. From the data, it is clear that, while Non-Kudumbashree members preferred to stay at home as good 'sanskari' wives to their husbands despite having a good education, the other group chose to supplement their family's income in different ways with the help of Kudumbashree with their limited education and skills. They may not be making a large amount of money but, a significant number of them felt grateful as they could make just enough to keep the private money lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates, away.

Interestingly, if one is to single out financially dependent respondents from total sample, around 44 % of the women from Kudumbashree group and 29.4% of Non- Kudumbashree group felt they had a lesser role in decision making concerning certain family affairs and believed it could be because of not having independent financial resources prior to their entry into public space. Obviously, the number of respondents who felt 'disempowered' due to the dearth of financial resources was less in Non-Kudumbashree group. In addition to this, it is found that Catagay's (1998:8) observation "*resource allocation within the household often biased against girls and women especially if and when the family face a severe resource crunch*" turned out to be true as more than 70% of those who joined Kudumbashree revealed that they used to feel ashamed of their financial dependency, therefore, they refrained from spending money on their personal needs. However, a few women who belonged to Non- Kudumbashree group believed, it was their husbands' duty to take care of their needs as they entered into the marriage as "equal" partners on account of either their high education/job or their wealthy and influential family background. And the rest (majority from the Non- Kudumbashree and 30% of Kudumbashree) were happy to be the second fiddle in their families as they believed, it was necessary to maintain the 'sanctity' of marriage.

The data further suggests that Kudumbashree has a significant role in bringing freshers into politics. While Kudumbashree had brought in 81.4% fresh faces to the political sphere in the last Panchayat election, only 55.9% fresh faces found places for themselves in the candidature lists without Kudumbashree. However, a small percentage (way less than 10%) of respondents with Kudumbashree believed their Kudumbashree background had nothing to do with their candidature as they or their family members had some political connection. Moreover, they believed that even if they were not a part of Kudumbashree, they would have gotten seats on account of their party connection. Though, they dismissed the idea of getting into politics through Kudumbashree, a few of them had recollected how Kudumbashree improved their overall personality and interpersonal skills to a certain extent.

When the researcher analyzed individual, social and political aspects of the respondents before they became active in public life, with the help of a few statements, it is found that around 60% from Kudumbashree group and a whopping 80% from the other group, had never turned down any opportunities previously to build up a political career which in turn confirmed the grim ‘reality’ of women’s political participation till two decades back. Their lower presence in the political sphere and the fact that a great majority of them had never been invited to take part in any of such political activities prior to Panchayati Raj, clearly indicates that neither women had been so keen on participating in political activities apart from the regular ritual of “voting” nor did men wanted women to be active in politics. Obviously, women’s failure to organize themselves as a political pressure group who could exert pressure on government bodies effectively in creating new spaces, occupying existing spaces or revalorizing negatively labelled spaces had been a source of ‘disempowerment’. Moreover, women believed politics was for powerful “men” and therefore never looked for political “opportunities” until it became mandatory. However, with the establishment of Kudumbashree which brought together women from a diverse socio-economic and political background, women started recognizing their own power and agency, as a good percentage of them expressed their regret for not utilizing all those opportunities effectively in the past to improve their status. The 20% gap between the Kudumbashree group and the Non- Kudumbashree indicates the former group’s tendency to *“move away from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to developing a critical perspective on it”* which is a critical prerequisite for empowerment (Kabeer,1999a:441). On top of that according to the fieldwork data, women belonged to the

privileged class showed a tendency to be more submissive and propagated patriarchal values than ordinary women who were less educated as a majority of (91.2%) Non-Kudumbashree group agreed to the statement *“though I had the freedom I preferred to go along with family’s political choice”* against Kudumbashree’s 64.4%.

Furthermore, it strengthens the argument, “Kudumbashree is capable of helping women to “unlearn” the ‘learned’ helplessness and thus to get rid of their “submissive” attitude by enabling them to recognize what was wrong with their previous lives, invoking “regrets” about all those missed opportunities now, encouraging them to look out for new opportunities”. From the facts presented above, it is very much clear that Kudumbashree plays an important role in bringing out women from lower socio-economic strata into political forefront. Besides, Kudumbashree opens up a way for the ‘freshers’ to start their political career. From the comparison of responses of the Kudumbashree and Non-Kudumbashree, the former group tends to be more assertive and confident than the privileged ones in the later. A concept map has been given below that explains how women reservation and Kudumbashree initiatives facilitated women’s entry into politics.

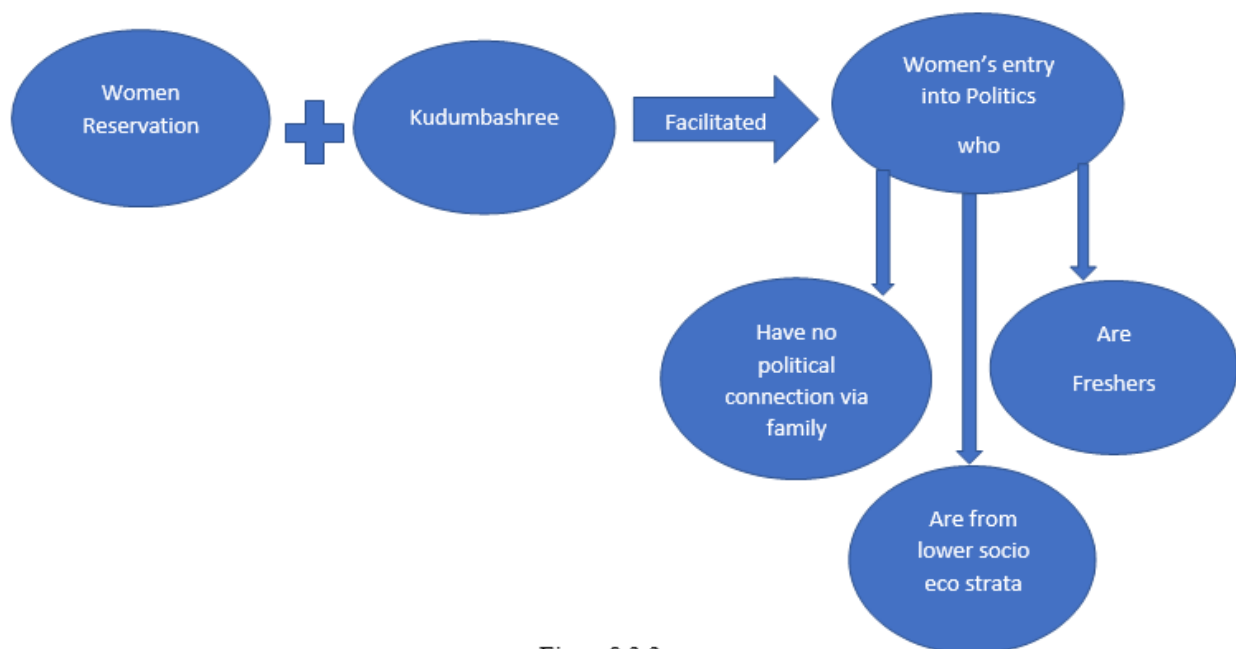


Figure8.3.2

Kudumbashree’s Role as a Facilitator

8.3.3. Stories behind the political entry of women without Kudumbashree and women with Kudumbashree

When it came to the story of their political entry, everyone had different stories to tell. However, a common thread could be seen in the case of Non- Kudumbashree group which had the capacity to ease out much of their teething troubles- a strong political connection through their families. A great majority of them (nearly 80%) had this advantage while 60% of the Kudumbashree group have made it through without apparent political connection. Further analysis of the data suggests that Non-Kudumbashree women members had an edge over others when it comes to the position of power within the committee, as they were politically well connected and from financially sound families. While 26.47 % of respondents without Kudumbashree were either President or vice president; the other group had a negligible 5.08% respondents with either of these titles. However, the number of respondents who have been working as health and education standing committee chairpersons is higher in Kudumbashree group (19) than Non-Kudumbashree group (10) and the reason is said to be Kudumbashree members' better connection with the grassroots plus they are able to make use of their Kudumbashree network across the panchayat as and when needed especially when they are supposed to run health awareness campaign all around the panchayat. It is further observed that Non-Kudumbashree women were majorly from political families and their political affiliation was well-known in their locality before their active involvement in the panchayat level election. While the second group had seven respondents (14.7%), who had been inducted into politics as replacements for their family members, no one from Kudumbashree claimed so. A few from the Non-Kudumbashree group believed it was their duty to take over from their husbands when they (husbands) move ahead to the next level to nurture their political dream. There were a couple of respondents who alternate their candidature between husband and wife in the Non-Kudumbashree category. The data depicts, Kudumbashree group's lack of political 'Godfathers' in the panchayat as nearly 85% of them had no close family members while 65% of Non-Kudumbashree group had someone in their families to support them.

From the facts and figures presented above, it is clear that entry into politics was smooth for Non-Kudumbashree women on account of their privileges. Once, they got elected, the chances are high that they would obviously be preferred for positions of power like president or vice-

president. Having been no ‘godfathers’ in politics a great majority from the Kudumbashree are on their own, and therefore it is not easy for them to land on prestigious positions during their first term itself. They will have to work really hard if they want to work their way up.

8.3.4 The gradual progression from ordinary lower-middle-class women to financially independent entities through Kudumbashree activities and later to women representatives in Panchayat.

The researcher incorporated this section specifically to check the extent of transformation experienced by an ordinary middle-class woman as a result of her Kudumbashree activities. The very first stage of her transformation is becoming a financially independent entity which in turn would help her to take firm decisions and to be assertive. Being financially dependent on someone has far-reaching consequences. The data points out that around 70% of the women who have joined Kudumbashree later, used to feel ashamed of their financial dependency and refrained from spending money on their personal needs fearing cut-throat interest rate of private money lenders. When resources are scarce women, tend to set aside most of their personal needs, and suffer silently. However, Kudumbashree brought about a change in this scenario as a great majority of them expressed their relief that they no longer have to depend on private money lenders. Precisely, 59.3% of them were financially independent though this group consisted of the maximum number of less educated and from financially unsound families. Besides, this group also had the maximum number of self- employed (25.4%) who were running small scale businesses like tailoring units, tea shops, soap manufacturing, organic farming with loans availed from their respective Kudumbashree units. Out of those financially independent, 50.8% had been earning below Rs.10,000/- only (ten thousand) which was way less than a Non-Kudumbashree respondent’s average monthly income. However low the income is, the thought of having a reliable source at hand itself has a great potential to improve one’s confidence. This sense of new, improved confidence was evident in the responses of the respondents as they have their own ‘bank’ to rely on as when needed. However, around 44 % of the women from Kudumbashree group and 29.4% of Non- Kudumbashree group felt they had a lesser role in decision making concerning certain family affairs and believed it could be because of not having independent financial resources prior to their entry into public space. Interestingly, the rest of them had found solace in the ‘assumption’

-which takes the patriarchy forward- that their duty was to support their husbands unconditionally no matter what and then the husbands would take care of everything.

When they were asked to reflect on how Kudumbashree helped them to improve their economic status, 96.61% of the respondents from Kudumbashree group felt this initiative had helped them to improve their financial status either directly or indirectly. Though there had not been a sharp increase in income, many of them got introduced to the idea of small saving schemes and opened bank accounts on their own. Most importantly, most of them have gained basic financial literacy and became aware of the consequences of their financial illiteracy. The percentage of the respondents who claimed they had made a substantial profit out of Kudumbashree activities stood at 62.8% while another 33.81% had borrowed money for consumption purposes. From the conversations with the respondents, it is understood that a good number of them have used this money towards meeting the study expenses of their children. However, a meagre 3.39% maintained that they had not been financially benefited from the Kudumbashree activities. More than half of the respondents (50.8%), believed they had the freedom to make financial decisions at their homes as they have won the trust of their partners since they started doing banking with Kudumbashree. Interestingly, 27.1% of them decided not to use their freedom to manage their finances as that was against our ‘culture’ and ‘traditions’, and around 20% said they did not have absolute freedom to manage their finances.

From the facts mentioned above, it is clear that Kudumbashree redefined the way rural women approach financial matters. Being part of Kudumbashree, they are all financially independent to a certain extent now, compared to the olden days when they had absolutely no source for additional income, apart from depending on ‘private’ financiers. Now they are confident that they have a reliable source right in front of them whenever a necessity occurs. However, as long as there are some women, who raid their husbands’ pockets to pay back the loans taken from Kudumbashree and also who decide not to use their ‘freedom’ to keep the patriarchal hierarchy intact, the initiatives like this could never fulfil its real purpose.

8.3.5 Link between Kudumbashree Experience and Effective Governance

This section specifically checked how Kudumbashree experience enabled its participants to make use of the skills they have either newly picked up or polished through its activities, in the political sphere. Kudumbashree even if it is primarily a poverty alleviation programme, it

encouraged women to be active citizens of the state by engaging in meaningful interaction with the local self-government institutions. Kudumbashree did not end up as a place where women gathered together just to collect weekly savings and for loan dispersal. Many Kudumbashree units think beyond this and actively conduct different programmes targeting personality development of its members. From the data, it is clear that almost everyone (76.3% Strongly agreed and 23.7% agreed), felt they have indeed improved their knowledge regarding rights and duties as a citizen through attending various classes hosted by their respective Kudumbashree groups. Though politics may not necessarily come up as a topic for discussion except when there is an election, a strong 83% agreed that Kudumbashree exposure enabled them to take a firm political stand as they were exposed to diverse point of views rather than the versions presented to them by their husbands. This itself can be considered as a huge advantage since it allows women to develop independent 'perspectives' on public matters. However, they tend to avoid open political discussions apart from the casual discussions during election times. Usually, from health to wealth management, women's safety to career guidance, marital counselling to issues related to child development, they discuss absolutely everything during such meetings.

Another area where Kudumbashree made an impact on is personality development. Data suggests that a good percentage (78%) of the respondents had never been exposed to public speaking previously or until they join Kudumbashree. It offered them plenty of chances to be up on the stage on different occasions. They all take turns to say welcome or thanks speech. Their peers support them by encouraging them. Even if they make errors, no one laughs or ridicule them as they are all travelling in the same boat. Gradually, they get used to the idea of public speaking. It is observed that nearly 86% found that their interpersonal skills had improved due to their Kudumbashree exposure. Similarly, those members who already had exposure to public speaking felt that Kudumbashree had been helping them to fine-tune their skills. Some of the respondents claimed that under the wings of Kudumbashree, they had gained the confidence to conduct training classes for hours. Some others pointed out that they became eloquent speakers and were able to talk from their hearts instead of reading out from a piece of paper.

The improved social visibility due to increased Kudumbashree activities helped them to get rid of the label of someone's wife or daughter from a particular family. To be precise, except one

all others believed that due to their Kudumbashree activities, people around them started calling them by their 'own' names rather than addressing them as someone's wife/daughter. Whoever worked as either ADS or CDS leaders further got the opportunity to expand their social network beyond the ward level. This had helped them at the time of elections as they have Kudumbashree colleagues all around the panchayat with whom they had a great rapport with.

A great majority (86.4%), had agreed that their active involvement with Kudumbashree inspired them to take up this challenging opportunity. In fact, a few gave entire credit to 'Kudumbashree' as they were absolutely sure that the party would not have even noticed them if they were not active in Kudumbashree. Another set of respondents recognized their Kudumbashree colleagues as their source of inspiration. Since Kudumbashree accommodates women from diverse backgrounds, conflicts may arise among them. They face many such situations daily, especially the duty of settling such conflicts falls on the leaders of the group. When they enter into panchayat with this experience, it surely helps them to sort out different issues arise within the committee and in the party. Also, it will be helpful if and when they try to attempt mediation between two aggrieving parties. It is found that 88.1% believed their experience with the Kudumbashree had improved their conflict resolution skills, and they no longer felt the urge to depend on their husbands to handle such situations like the majority in the Non-Kudumbashree group.

Kudumbashree has made a big difference in the way women approach matters related to gender issues. They started to think beyond gender prejudices and worked towards the collective good. Majority of them (around 80%) believed it was Kudumbashree that enabled them to take a strong stand against unjust and uncivil practices in the society. Another significant advantage they enjoyed was that they had a reliable support system within their Kudumbashree units. Apart from a few, the rest had strong support from their Kudumbashree colleagues. Moreover, it is found that members who got leadership exposure through the organizational hierarchy of Kudumbashree had a better level of performance than its ordinary members and the same can be proven by a comparison between Case 1 and Case 4 given in chapter VII.

The discussions above reveal that the exposure to Kudumbashree leads to improvement in their interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, conflict resolution skills and self-confidence. From flood relief camps to running plastic recycling units, Kudumbashree is everywhere.

Therefore, it would be safe to assume that Kudumbashree helps women to march on to the political sphere confidently, armed with skills which are either newly picked up or polished during their Kudumbashree days.

8.3.6 Relationship between their increased social visibility as a result of their Kudumbashree activities and their increased political consciousness

It is observed that a woman's public visibility increases as a result of her group involvement. Once they join Kudumbashree, they get more chances to go out of the four walls of their houses and to interact with the public. Group's weekly meetings, visits to the bank and other public offices keep them engaged as well as 'visible' in the society's social sphere. The data analysis in chapter VI shows a massive increase in the percentage of respondents who started visiting bank/government institutions after they joined in Kudumbashree (from 30.5% to 86.4%) and the percentage of respondents who started attending Gram Sabha meetings had been doubled (i.e., from around 40% to more than 80%). Since the inception of Kudumbashree, its members have been voicing women's concerns out in the open with the help of their improved communication skills and confidence, on different platforms. The same has been proved by the fact that, out of 80% of those who attended Gram Sabha meetings regularly, 68% of them raise questions and issues regarding the welfare of women and children. Whenever a Gram Sabha meeting or any other public meeting occurs in the panchayat, Kudumbashree members show up in large numbers and take special initiative to publicize among the general public. While implementing governmental projects in villages, local governments often use Kudumbashree's well-established social networks*. It not only gives credibility to women's efforts but enhances their self-confidence as well. It was further observed that the frequency of their Panchayat visits had also been increased drastically after they became Kudumbashree members. This, in fact, allowed them to observe the happenings at the panchayat from a distance and to build a useful rapport with the staff and other officials there. They got to familiarize with the 'system', and a few claimed that they picked up certain terms like spillover fund, women component plan, gender budgeting and the likes commonly used in the panchayat. Moreover, Kudumbashree women who used to work alongside their respective ward members to conduct Gram Sabha meetings found it extremely easy to integrate into the system once they are elected. For example, one of the members of Paippad Panchayat (Binu Kumar) fondly remembered how Kudumbashree prepared

her for the job of an elected member by giving her opportunities to assist her then ward member. She pointed out, the perseverance she had shown during her tenure with the Kudumbashree as one of the reasons that helped her to become the Vice. President when she got elected for the very first time into the Panchayat during 2010- 2015.

Kudumbashree's ability to produce women leaders with strong independent political views remained questionable as the data suggests if one decides to contest, she prefers a party in which her husband or father is a member. However, indicators such as the number of women who proudly 'owned up' their decision to enter into politics (30% against the Non- Kudumbashree group's nominal 11.8%) and those who took unconventional steps to enter into politics were more in Kudumbashree empowered group suggest that women leaders who have come through Kudumbashree exhibit more endurance than the Non-Kudumbashree ones. While a great majority (85.3%) from Non-Kudumbashree group preferred to follow the political party, which was being followed by their family, the Kudumbashree group had 11.3% respondents who opted for "me and this party share same ideology" and another 15.3% opted for " this is the only party which offered me a seat" implies at least a few respondents from Kudumbashree group prefer to follow a political party of their own choice rather than blindly taking up their family's choices. Apart from this, the Kudumbashree group has a good number of respondents who were actively involved in movements targeting social change as organizers instead of being 'passive' spectators. While a majority from Non-Kudumbashree group (76.5%) admitted that they had never participated in any socio-political movements targeting a favourable social change, the other group had just 42% of such respondents which means they get such opportunities through Kudumbashree. For example, a good number of respondents from Kudumbashree group had actively involved in the anti-beverages** protest happened just before the panchayat election in 2015. Moreover, from the data (table 5. 22.1), it is clear that 7 out of 8 respondents from Non-Kudumbashree group, who were agreed to have participated in a socio-political movement before their election, said they did so on the insistence of their politically active family members. However, in Kudumbashree group there were women who organized anti-liquor movements (Eg: Aparna, Priyanka, Kudumbashree group) who conducted protests demanding the timely release of the NREGP wages (Eg: Suja, Kudumbashree group) well as a woman who fought relentlessly against a private school that threatened the very existence of a public Anganwadi where she was a teacher (Priyanka, Kudumbashree group).

The data further suggests that 69.4% with Kudumbashree experience has been exposed to some kind of leadership roles during their tenure within the organization whereas 61.8% of the Non-Kudumbashree group either "strongly agreed or agreed" that they had never handled any sort of leadership positions before becoming elected representatives. As part of Kudumbashree, most of them regularly attended awareness generation classes and entrepreneurship development programmes. In fact, Kudumbashree offered them genuine reasons to 'go out' of their houses regularly and thus to be visible in society. Irrespective of its modern outlook and the high literacy rate, the people in Kerala still follows some of the patriarchal rules ardently. For example, they do not entertain their women to roam around unless there are genuine reasons to justify the purpose of their 'outings'. When the local governments started utilizing the networks of Kudumbashree to conduct surveys for identifying poorest of poor families in the locality to implement welfare programmes and for conducting works under NREGP (National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme- a programme started in 2006 by then Central Government to address rural unemployment) Kudumbashree women's presence within the community has drastically improved. Since they take up such jobs as representatives of local governments, the people around them take it as 'genuine' and 'worthy' rather than opportunities to roam around aimlessly.

Kudumbashree women who worked as ADS/CDS leaders used to get more opportunities to expand their social acquaintances. Besides, a great number of women participants took this as a much needed 'second chance' to 'nurture' some of their innate talents as many of them felt they had been wasting away their talents within the four walls of their homes doing nothing but routine household chores. In a society where even full-time working women are expected to fulfil their homely duties prior to their professional commitments despite having an income equivalent to their husbands, a jobless woman would never expect, she will be respected for what she is. Therefore, there is no wonder if such women felt they are being sidelined when it comes to significant decisions within the family. If the people around them do not 'value' their hard work inside their own homes as worthwhile for appreciation, they may feel desperately unloved and neglected. Indian feminists' plea for the legitimization of unpaid household labour since the 1980's has not been fruitful. In such a scenario, Kudumbashree presented them with certain opportunities to be economically self-sufficient, socially active and politically relevant. However, the existence of a few women who believed in not challenging the evil effects of

patriarchy in the sample, reveals the fact that Kudumbashree also has failed to address the underlying issues created by the patriarchal mindset which has been sustaining over the centuries, irrespective of its success in implanting seeds of feminist ideologies. Though a few of them even equated their decision to work with Kudumbashree as their “second birth” as it gave them a chance to be active within the society, they are not yet ready to challenge some of the age-old traditions which are detrimental to their overall status. For example, the percentage of women who vouched they would not utilize their freedom, though they have the freedom to spend their money without taking permission from their husbands, is as high as 27.1% in the Kudumbashree group. From this, it is clear that, though Kudumbashree expands certain capabilities of its participants the extent of their activeness/vigour is still regulated by the existing gender norms in the society.

Though the respondents with Kudumbashree background overtly denied they had engaged in political discussions during weekly meetings, a substantial 62.7% strongly agreed that Kudumbashree, in fact, helped them to nurture political opinions which are different from their family’s and to take firm political decisions. As discussed in chapter VI, Kudumbashree meetings serve as a place where one gets exposed to different perspectives, unlike in their families where they might be forced to go with the biased ones of their male relatives. Except for a negligible 10.2%, the rest had acknowledged Kudumbashree’s role in giving them the strength to express their social concerns openly. At times they would discuss different ways and means to curb sexual harassments and exploitations existing around them during weekly meetings. Theoretically, discussions within the Kudumbashree about a wide range of topics such as wealth management, health issues, marital discords and children’s education should help them to develop their own perspectives. However, a few from the Kudumbashree group have expressed their concerns over the fact that Kudumbashree’s recent deviation from its original course due to group members’ loss of interest to pursue anything other than thrift and credit activities.

**Social network- the chain of communication existing within the organizational structure of Kudumbashree*

*** government-owned outlets that sell alcohol*

The data and the discussions above clearly indicate that the increased social visibility due to Kudumbashree activities had improved women's chances of being recognized as a 'potential' contender for the post. However, if one decides to contest, her first preference would be the party in which her husband or father is a member just like any other ordinary women. The question arises as to why these women refuse to be liberated and empowered from the patriarchy? Doesn't it mean that Kudumbashree also ended up as a space where the behaviours of women have been regulated by the existing gender norms? While Kudumbashree preaches the need for making independent and bold women, it still holds on to the traditional views of women as caretakers of their families and expects them to conform to roles traditionally assigned to them by spending any extra income they have earned towards the betterment of their families rather than spending towards their personal necessities. However, it is observed that exposure to Kudumbashree surely helped them to develop a critical perspective on the happenings around them. But then, they let the same age-old patriarchy to govern their ability to make use of their newly developed skill sets or confidence, to be 'enablers' of patriarchy and thus ensure its furtherance. Unfortunately, a good number of them are not even aware of it.

8.3.7 The extent of transformation experienced by Kudumbashree empowered panchayat members and Non-Kudumbashree members.

The researcher imparted this objective to know more about the implications of one of the life-changing decisions each of them had taken a while ago- entering into politics- a field in which women had minimal presence previously. For many, this decision turned out as an awe- inspiring one, but some felt this as a challenging and demanding one. Either way, it surely, has changed many aspects of their lives. The section below summarizes the major findings related to their transformation from ordinary women to women with a certain kind of power and authority bestowed upon them by the government.

From the discussions under the heading 8.3.6 in this chapter, it is clear that women who are actively working with Kudumbashree will easily be identified as 'ideal' candidates for the post on account of their exceptional work within the organization while the other group often 'use' their families' legacy to get into politics and such candidates will always be recognized by their family names or by their spouses'. There are instances where their Kudumbashree colleagues nominated certain women candidates and took all the efforts to bring them to the notice of senior

leaders in the area. The data also points out that the number of women who replaced their politically active spouses as a result of women reservation is more in the Non- Kudumbashree group. In fact, no one from the Kudumbashree group has been directly inducted into the panchayat as a replacement.

The answers to the queries related to check the improvement in their social relevance after being elected as Panchayat members, prove that irrespective of their Kudumbashree background, they all started getting more attention and affection from the general public than before. The number of social invitations as well as the number of telephone calls they receive daily has drastically increased. In addition to the matters related to Panchayat, the constituents often seek their advice on a lot of other issues also, especially women open up their personal and family problems freely to them for solace. A good number of respondents from both groups find themselves with a lot more invitations for delivering public speeches. However, Kudumbashree group made a niche for themselves with more than 98% of the respondents either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement, which is a solid proof for their sudden improvement in their social status. Obviously, Kudumbashree empowered ones, get more opportunities to be moderators or speakers in Kudumbashree's meetings once they elected. Apart from the social sphere, improvements have been noticed in their status within the family for both sets of respondents. However, the percentage of women from Kudumbashree group stands out with a whopping 76.3 % against Non-Kudumbashree group's 42.3% "Strongly agree". In the case of Kudumbashree trained women, there is a sharp increase in their social graph. They make use of this opportunity to improve their social respectability and climb up the social ladder. At the same time, the other group may not experience such a considerable jump in their social mobility from their previous status as most of them belonged to the 'privileged' class of the society. The respondents from Non-Kudumbashree group who were retired teachers said they never felt any difference as many people had been approaching them for personal advice and to speak publicly before elections.

The data suggest that though there is an increase in their status within the family and society, most of them preferred not to use this 'increased status' as an excuse to run away from their domestic duties and responsibilities. Irrespective of their Kudumbashree background a good majority of them hate to leave their domestic responsibilities to someone else. Except for

a negligible few, the rest had to juggle both responsibilities without much help from their extended families and believed it was their duty to preserve the traditional ‘sanctity’ of marriage by not overpowering their husbands, so they tried their best to leave behind their ‘power’ before entering the gate to their houses.

The data suggests that there is an improvement in the social status of each of the respondents participated in this study. The ‘improvement’ has been more visible in the case of Kudumbashree empowered ones as they used this opportunity to speed up their social mobility. A few of them, especially those who had earlier faced alienation from the mainstream on account of their lower socio-economic and educational standard converted this opportunity to carve out a much better position within the society. While such respondents happily termed their experience as an awe-inspiring one, a few, especially those who came into this field out of compulsion felt it as an ‘unnecessary headache’ which has been choking up their already busy schedule.

8.3.8 Kudumbashree exposure and their ability to exercise political agency confidently

This section specifically looks into Kudumbashree’s role in transforming ordinary women into stubborn politicians. The factors analyzed here included their ability to withstand pressure from the party cadre and the extent of their family’s involvement in their official matters. Concerning the latter, it is observed that, except for a quarter of the sample with Kudumbashree background and a nominal 15% of the other group, the rest admitted that they would discuss every aspect of the committee meetings with their family members. Generally, it is observed that majority of women discuss proceedings within the panchayat committee with their immediate family members. The percentage of respondents who refrained from seeking direct advice from their family members on matters related to Panchayat is found to be high in Kudumbashree group. In the case of their ability to resist political pressure also, Kudumbashree group has better indicators suggesting they were bolder than Non-Kudumbashree group in certain areas. For example, the Kudumbashree group has 42.2 % of the respondents who said they would not compromise with the party under any circumstances while the other group has just 20.9% who vouched for the same. In addition to this, the Kudumbashree group housed a greater number of respondents who have opinions that contradict with the party’s view. Interestingly, more than half of the total respondents (52.7%) stayed away from an answer when asked if they would keep silence if the safety of their family is at risk, at the same time Kudumbashree group has 10% who "strongly

disagreed" and 30.5% who "disagreed" against Non-Kudumbashree group's 5.9 % and 18% respectively. Therefore, it must be safe to presume that Kudumbashree makes women stronger and fearless to a certain extent. Yet the question remains, why a great number of women are still seeking advice or needed validation from the male members of their family, which is unacceptable in this day and age. Except for a negligible few, the rest has been in favour of conforming to existing social and gender norms and wishes to complete their term 'risk-free'. Since choosing defiance (adopting behaviours which are deemed inappropriate for a female politician) is a risky tactic (Beauvoir, 1949/2011) and also considered as something which could "devalue" themselves socially, they preferred to keep a low profile. Interestingly, a majority of them believed, if they do not conform to the stereotype of 'conventional' women politicians, the people will rout them out in the next election. Among the total sample, there is a woman who said she is afraid of wearing new sarees let alone costly ones, fearing accusation of engaging in corruption. Therefore, she tends to be more careful and cautious with her daily conducts and the way of dressing. When it comes to a woman's conducts within the home, if she behaves someone with power and authority especially after becoming an elected representative, she may face allegations of being arrogant and someone who overpowers her husband. In certain cases, women who previously had the freedom to make decisions, have decided not to use it anymore fearing of branding them as being 'pompous' and 'bossy'. Even women with Kudumbashree background failed to make an impression under this category as there are respondents who believed their political future remains with their husbands' decisions. Case study 5 can be taken as an example in which a Kudumbashree empowered respondent, who seemed to be independent and bold outwardly, stated that she would not go up the political ladder if her husband decides against it. Besides, much to the embarrassment of the Non-Kudumbashree group which consisted of women who replaced their spouses due to reservation, the researcher met a reasonable number of women who said they would happily accept 'coaching' from their husbands on what to say and what not to say within the committee meetings. Though the data does not support the existence of a great number of women who have been mere rubber stamps of their husbands who sign documents forwarded to them by their husbands without even reading -thanks to the better socio-economic and educational indicators of Kerala- a great majority prefer to discuss official matters with their husbands and take their decisions accordingly. Furthermore, some indications

suggest a great number of them ardently adopt patriarchy but in a more relaxed form, unlike the one that exists in the northern part of our country. Also, knowingly or unknowingly, they ensure its furtherance to the next generation as carriers or enablers.

Unfortunately, the organization which has been set up with the idea of making Kerala's female power more vibrant and empowered ended up as something that promotes their independence but well within the existing patriarchal framework. Besides, women themselves do not wish to break free off the family commitments and are ready to exhaust themselves with extra responsibilities that come with their elevated position without troubling their spouses.

When it comes to the issue of gender discrimination within the party, the majority from both sets were contented and thanked their 'gender' itself for this opportunity. Apart from a negligible few, the rest were even sympathetic towards men as they were less in number in most of the Panchayats. Moreover, they believed it was an 'injustice' to contest in general seats as it would further reduce the number of men. The percentage of respondents who had either agreed or strongly agreed that they had indeed faced gender discrimination within the party is higher in the Non-Kudumbashree group, i.e., 24% against Kudumbashree group's 10%. Since the latter group consisted of a higher number of freshers, they may not feel as offended as the veterans when they were not allowed to climb up the political ladder after a certain level. In the cases of veterans, they felt they had not been appropriately rewarded with higher positions even after spending many years in this field. Out of those who complained, there were women with more than 20 years of political experience and expertise who believed if they were men, they would be serving in better positions instead of sitting in the same panchayat for multiple terms. In addition to this, political parties often discourage women from contesting in general seats and the same can be confirmed from the data as more than 50% of the Kudumbashree group and nearly 50% of the other group either "*agreed or strongly agreed*" to the statement 'party will not allocate two consecutive terms for women' in the interview schedule. From the data, it is clear that there were two types of respondents in the total sample, the ones who believed women should not contest from general seats as it is an injustice against men and those who believed women must contest from general seats as well if they have the confidence to win. Interestingly, Kudumbashree's empowered respondents showed more confidence to contest in general seats while Non- Kudumbashree preferred to stick on to reserved seats. It is further observed that

Kudumbashree empowered ones who were in opposition party vociferously oppose the ruling party if they have made any wrong decisions. The statement, to check if they were capable of expressing their ideas in the meetings revealed that except for a negligible few, almost everyone from the total sample felt that they were doing it effectively. Surprisingly, A good number of respondents irrespective of their Kudumbashree background believed that their men colleagues did not overpower them in the committee as women were a strong force (numerically) in almost all panchayats. However, around 40% of women with Kudumbashree and 35% of women without Kudumbashree either "agreed or strongly agreed" to the statement, "I had faced difficulties with proving myself" implies women still struggle to establish themselves as leaders whom the followers instantly trust. For women having a lower socio-economic background, this struggle is said to be even harder as people tend to approach them with a prejudiced mindset. To gain their trust and confidence, such women leaders work hard and dedicate more time but do not get appreciated enough. Since Kudumbashree members have minimal external help in terms of connections with senior party leaders and influential family members, they have to work hard to flourish in this field.

Overall, the data suggest that women members tend to discuss happenings in the panchayat committee with their immediate family members and political leaders. Moreover, the chances are high that they end up taking advice from their spouses regarding matters related to the governance of the panchayat. However, the facts like Kudumbashree group has a higher number of respondents who said they would not budge under political pressure and also has a smaller number of respondents who blatantly stated they would happily accept 'coaching' from their husbands, show that they are indeed bolder and stronger than the other group.

8.3.9 Difficulties faced by Non-Kudumbashree women due to their sudden and unplanned entry into the public sphere, especially during their first term as panchayat members.

This section highlights explicitly, certain difficulties experienced by the direct entrants during their first term as panchayat members. Non-Kudumbashree group consisted of more than 88% of women who agreed that they had little or absolutely no knowledge about the 'functioning' of the Panchayat before starting out as panchayat members. In addition to that, most of them had no experience with any kind of leadership positions. A good majority (73.5%) of them stated that they had never visited the panchayat office prior to the election and more than 50% of them

faced troubles when they were asked to chair meetings as standing committee chairpersons. According to a few, when they were asked to conduct Gram Sabha meetings in their electoral wards, they did not know how to coordinate such a meeting as many of them had never attended such events previously. At the same time, a majority of Kudumbashree empowered ones never faced such a situation where they felt 'clueless' as they used to attend such events actively, during their Kudumbashree days. The data suggest that Non-Kudumbashree members suffered mainly with their lack of experience with the leadership roles, difficulty in public speaking, unfamiliarity with the routine affairs of the Panchayat and their aversiveness to get themselves involved in conflict resolutions. While a great majority from Non-Kudumbashree group (60%) agreed that they would seek the support of their spouses or party colleagues to resolve conflicts, Kudumbashree group had just above 10% of the respondents who agreed with the same. Since Non-Kudumbashree group comprised of respondents with strong political backing, they never faced a dearth of 'foot soldiers' for campaigning. However, many of them agreed that they had to work hard to establish rapport with the people in their wards as their faces/names were not so familiar for ordinary voters in their wards. However, they managed pretty well with the popularity of their 'surnames' or their 'house names'. Compared to the Kudumbashree group Non-Kudumbashree group has a higher number of respondents (60%) who would blindly accept party chief's decisions without critical thinking. The group consisted of just 17.6% of respondents who confidently agreed that they are bold and assertive enough to call a spade a spade. Another major area where Non-Kudumbashree respondents were seemed to be lagging behind the Kudumbashree empowered ones, is their reluctance to talk about 'sensitive' issues like sexual exploitation and harassment. Apart from a few teachers, the rest of the respondents from well to do families felt, it was not their prerogative to talk about such things. On the other hand, Kudumbashree members, who used to attend classes and seminars on matters like this, were found to be more alert about possible sexual harassment and violation of women's rights.

The findings under this section point out that a good number of respondents without Kudumbashree background have ended up here unplanned and unprepared. In fact, majority of Non-Kudumbashree group agreed that their initial years had been a struggle as they were 'forced' to take up those positions unprepared and the group consisted the maximum number of women who replaced their husbands or one of the parents. If one is to compare women's mode of entry

into politics, 'the family' route has still been one of the prominent routes followed by the Kudumbashree route and one's own political 'merit'. The interviews clearly indicate that except for a negligible few, the rest had been entered through either of the first two routes. Even in the Kudumbashree group, there were 24 respondents (40.68%) who had a political connection through their families out of which 58.33% agreed that they had close ties with someone influential in their party. From this, it is evident that the family's political connection is still playing an important role in one's political entry. Whenever political parties on the lookout for a right woman candidate the first preference is usually given to someone with a strong political connection within the family, the next chance is given to those who come up through Kudumbashree but with certain political ties, in between a negligible few may get into politics on their own which suggests that ordinary women who do not have any of these advantages may still struggle to get into politics as envisaged. Besides, the data confirms the existence of dynastic politics among Non-Kudumbashree group, which effectively put non- dynastic participants out of the picture.

8.3.10 Kudumbashree women's inspiration to climb up the political ladder and remain in the politics

This section checks if women aspire to stay back in politics longer to serve society by accepting different opportunities to be politically active. The data suggest that women irrespective of their Kudumbashree background do not dream of climbing up the political ladder beyond a certain level. According to the data, 35.3% of Non-Kudumbashree women are looking forward to remaining as politicians, against Kudumbashree group's 25.4%. While 44.1% of the Non-Kudumbashree group desires to go back to their previous lives, Kudumbashree group has only 28.8% of such cases. Interestingly, a good number of respondents from Kudumbashree group preferred to be active in the socio-political arena after the end of their current term. In general, women tend to take their success - their elevated position as panchayat members which is a mediocre achievement in every sense- as a 'great' one, and therefore they do not aim for higher achievements in politics. While some women blame it on their 'exhaustion' of managing both home and the ward, a few others feel this achievement itself is significant enough to be proud of and for some others the fear of failure holds them back. One of the respondents even quoted a

Malayalam proverb *'it is always better to stop singing when your voice is still beautiful and young'* to say extending this career may end up as a damp squib.

8.3.11 The extent of 'political individuation' experienced by Kudumbashree members

This section looks explicitly into how Kudumbashree facilitates women's entry into politics and how do they use this "invited" space of political reservation to invent a 'space' for themselves to gain political individuation. The Kudumbashree empowered women's strong presence in the total sample (63.44%) itself is a clear indication that Kudumbashree inspires women to take up politics to a certain extent. The study brings forth evidence that suggests Kudumbashree members needed less persuasion to enter into politics, unlike the Non- Kudumbashree group. Discussions under 8.3.6 indicate that a good number of them not only readily agreed to contest without much external pressure from their family or political leadership but also proudly 'owned up' their decision to enter into politics. Instead of merely stating they are being forced to enter into politics by their spouses they pointed out different reasons for their political entry like, *"I wanted to change the current system"*, *"I followed this party because my ideologies match with theirs"*, unlike a majority in the Non-Kudumbashree group. And therefore, it can be safely assumed that women in Kudumbashree group are slightly inclined towards taking up 'unconventional' steps to enter into politics instead of the usual tried and tested method of following family politics. Out of those respondents who contested in general seats, 75% were members of Kudumbashree mission which is also an excellent achievement for the organization. While women without Kudumbashree walk away from opportunities to contest from general seats believing it as an 'injustice' towards men, the Kudumbashree empowered ones boldly took up such opportunities and showed more confidence in winning general seats. Out of both sets of respondents, those with Kudumbashree background possessed a much better chance of being recognized in her own name rather than being recognized by their spouses' or father's names as they were actively involved in Kudumbashree activities in their area. In addition to this, this study suggests Kudumbashree enabled women gradually 'unlearn' certain "learned" helplessness they picked up during their lifetime in a highly patriarchal society. For example, while Non-Kudumbashree group consisted of 91.2 % of respondents who preferred to go along with their family's political choices without utilizing their freedom fearing to offend them, the Kudumbashree group has just 64.4% of such cases. It is observed that women

belonged to the privileged class showed a tendency to be more submissive and propagated patriarchal values than the ordinary women who were less educated. From the data, it is clear that women irrespective of their Kudumbashree background believe, within the family, they should not behave or act as a woman with power or authority as it may affect the structure of their family. The percentage of respondents who proudly said they would leave behind their authority back in the panchayat is almost the same for both groups. However, the Kudumbashree enabled ones possess certain advantages over the other due to their exposure with the Kudumbashree groups especially those who had worked as leaders in the group are found to be fearless and assertive with better articulation power. The participatory nature of the Kudumbashree programme, which encourages participants' presence from the planning stage to evaluation is like a learning curve for them. They learn and unlearn many things, including the way in which they express their political agency as well as the way they interact with the state. While they work in Kudumbashree units, they act as a point of contact to their ward members and assist them to conduct Gram Sabha in their wards, and they get themselves involved in the day to day functions of the ward member. Therefore, a good number of Kudumbashree empowered ones feel their elevation from ordinary women to ward members is easy and smooth. In fact, their experience within the organization can broaden their political vision beyond the 'one' they usually share with their husbands or other male family members. Therefore, active participation in Kudumbashree units can be seen as the first step towards a career in politics as it not only expands one's social network and social visibility significantly but also gives them opportunities to polish their leadership skills and provides on-job training.

Kerala political history explains that the patriarchal culture of politics excludes women from holding powerful positions (Jeffrey, 2016). On the other hand, women accessed legislative bodies at the central or state level reveals the role of male political patronage or family dynasties (Varghese & Mavoothu, 2014). Kerala's political culture is mapped with a set of ideas of the public on the political distinctions between left and right, wherein the space of cultural and political struggles mostly occupied by the left (Lukose, 2005). When the PRA forced political parties to choose female candidates at grassroots level left-leaning parties found concentrating on Kudumbashree, and the leading CPI (M) made an attempt to build a base through Kudumbashree later (Devika, 2016). However, women's participation in Kudumbashree changed their outlook that they came forward as prospective leaders in local politics (Varghese

& Mavoothu, 2014). This study supports the view that the women in Kerala attained a new perspective of their lives being active socially and politically. Different from the finding of earlier studies that proved left domination among women in local politics, this study found a distribution of its participants among all parties in Kerala in proportion to their foothold in current Kerala politics (Chapter 6, Table 6.15). Yet, this study substantiates the opinion that the local political culture that diverges political entry (Shihabudheen, 2013) to those who are having male patronage keeps sustainability of Kudumbashree mission questionable.

8.4 Limitations

The respondents were not easily accessible to be interviewed during the fieldwork. Many respondents were careful in expressing their opinions on various issues. While discussing matters related to party leader's or their spouse's influence on their decisions and also about corrupted practices in the system, they often held up their mind. Therefore, the findings may not reflect the genuine perception of the respondents. Two of the respondents sought permission from their husbands before responding to the researcher's queries and one among them, let her husband answer certain questions. During the one-to-one interviews, some phone calls often interrupted the interactions.

8.5 Suggestions

This study puts forth certain suggestions based on the researcher's extensive field survey and analysis, which surely can influence expected outcomes of policies and programmes targeting women empowerment in the future. As a pioneer programme whose primary target was to empower poor women by making them self-sufficient, Kudumbashree somehow failed to liberate women from becoming the propagators of patriarchy absolutely. The organization which was initially put together to give them a space where women could think, talk and do things differently and independently without being mere dependents of their male relatives, however, turned a blind eye towards the habit of raiding their husband's pockets to pay off loans availed from Kudumbashree and cross-borrowings from other self-help groups. The thought of women's secondary status has been written in their minds so boldly, and it is very difficult to change it now. Therefore, new and innovative researches should be carried out in order to identify new measures to get rid of women's inherent submissive attitude. Since it is tough to change older women's 'patriarchal psyche', the need of the hour is a complete overhaul of the

way we bring up our future generation. Towards this end, Kudumbashree's children's wing Balasabha could be of great help as this programme primarily targets "to prevent inter-generational transmission of poverty through capability enhancement of children" (kudumbashree.org). Like in the case of Kudumbashree, this children's forum also works in close association with the Gram Panchayats. Spaces like this should be used for inculcating children with ideas of gender equity, human rights, democratic values and the likes. Further studies need to be carried out to explore the effectiveness of Balasabha and its ability to prepare children, especially girl children, for the roles of political leaders.

Another area where women's submissive attitude has seen overpowering their sense of authority and ownership is their reluctance to contest from general seats even if they are confident of winning. A significant number of women opine that they were more than satisfied with the earlier reservation cap of 33% and they behave as if they are in a place, which they do not deserve. And their male counterparts also behave as though they are making a great 'sacrifice' by setting aside a few seats for the women who possess no political knowledge or leadership skills. To change this belief, interventions targeting certain behavioural changes in the way we bring up our children are needed. Ideally, organizations like Kudumbashree should be able to convince young mothers about the importance of giving equal opportunities for their girl children to participate in different political processes. If we bring up our children in such a way, our girls will surely be able to occupy political spaces confidently and also with a sense of authority which in turn would stop furtherance of the evil effects of the patriarchy.

8.6 Conclusion

While the world at large makes out gender equality as the key to sustainable development and women empowerment as an antidote to gender-based discriminations, the quintessential performance of Kudumbashree, an agency for women empowerment is to uproot the patriarchal norms of the society. Regardless of the continuous generation of awareness and opportunities to come forward to the mainstream of the society, the tendency for certain Kudumbashree members to follow age-old patriarchy is a despairing factor. Empowerment agency supported women entered into politics are believed to exercise their power and authority bestowed upon them within this 'invited space' of political participation- a space where women are supposed to be functioning independently with certain power and authority. Unfortunately, the data confirms

women's tendency to utilize the political authority in such a way that it jells with their subordinate status in society. This finding is in tally with the observation made by Megarry (2014) quoted by Williams, Devika and Aandahl (2015:1114) about the ideals of femininity promoted within Kudumbashree, *"for the increased 'voice' it provides to women is accompanied by their expected adherence to conservative norms of upholding family values and giving service to their community"*. However, the members came up through Kudumbashree had been outperformed those who had no Kudumbashree exposure especially in the areas like gender sensitivity, ability to handle political pressure, connection with the grassroots, conflict resolution skills and soft skills. Kudumbashree was indeed a success in terms of instilling several behavioural changes among women from lower socio-economic strata, though it evidently failed in making bolder women who have no qualms in taking up evil effects of patriarchy. Creating 'invited spaces' which are absolutely free from its' maker's cultural and political baggage is nearly impossible unless there is a whirlwind transformation in the way we treat our women. Kudumbashree has tapped on a new space of political empowerment equipping women with networks and assigning them community governing role at a later age. However, delaying the entry of women into politics is normative and socially sanctioned within the large rubrics of the dominant discourses that assign women's adulthood on family building and child-rearing.

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FIELD WORK TRAILS

PHOTOGRAPHS



ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS



FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

WITH WOMEN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES



WITH BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES



WITH PARTICIPANTS OF KUDUMBASHREE



KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS



KUDUMBASHREE INITIATIVES

SWAD RESTAURANT



SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME BY KARUKACHAL KUDUMBASHREE UNIT



Mobile Health Care Unit by Kudumbashree
unit of Elikkulam Panchayat



Inside a Kudumbashree office



A COMMITTEE MEETING IN PROGRESS



PUBLIC MEETING



Annexure 1

Interview Schedule 1

For Respondents with Kudumbashree background

This schedule has been formulated for women who are a part of Kudumbashree Mission in Kottayam District of Kerala. This research entitled “Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in Politically Empowering Women in Kottayam District of Kerala” is to fulfill my doctorate degree in the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Telangana. I shall use this data strictly for my academic work and your answers would be kept confidential.

Jinu Francis

PhD. Research scholar (14SIPH06)

University of Hyderabad

Part I: Personal Details

(Instruction: Fill in the details or tick the correct option)

1. Name :
2. Age :
3. Address :
4. Religion :
5. Caste :
6. Marital Status : ☐ Married
☐ Unmarried
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced

7. Educational Qualification: ☐ Matriculate
☐ Intermediate
☐ Graduate
☐ Post Graduate
☐ Other, specify _____
8. Occupation : ☐ Employed
☐ Home maker
☐ Student
☐ Self-employed
☐ Other, specify _____
9. Type of family: ☐ Joint
☐ Nuclear
☐ Single parent
☐ Other, specify _____
10. Family belongs to: ☐ BPL
☐ APL
☐ Not aware
11. Occupation of father/ husband:
12. Panchayat :
13. Ward :
14. Block :
15. Are you elected from a reserved seat for women? ☐ Yes
☐ No
16. Your position in the Panchayat: ☐ Ward member
☐ Vice. President
☐ President
☐ Other, specify _____
17. Since when have you been holding the above-mentioned position:
18. Names of the standing committees in the Panchayat, are you a part of:
19. Political affiliation, if any _____
☐ Independent

20. Is it your first term as a member? ☐ Yes
☐ No

21. If No, give following details:

a. Duration of the previous terms:

b. Was it from a reserved seat? ☐ Yes
☐ No

c. Have you held any particular positions of power during those terms?

Part II: Respondent's Life as a Non Kudumbashree/ Non-Panchayat Member

1. Whether you had your own source of income? ☐ Yes
☐ No

1.1 If Yes, specify your monthly income: ☐ Below Rs. 10,000
☐ Rs. 10,000- 20,000
☐ Rs. 20,000- 30,000
☐ Rs. 30,000- 40,000
☐ Above Rs. 40,000

1.2 If No, whom you are depending on?

☐ Spouse
☐ Parents
☐ Children
☐ Other, Specify _____

2. Psychological effects of financial dependency (if you had a feeling that you were not contributing enough) before joining Kudumbashree

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I used to feel 'ashamed' of my inability to contribute substantially towards monthly family expenses					
I used to refrain from buying personal goods due to financial constraints					
It kept me away from my family's decision making and lead roles					

3. Individual, Social and Political aspects before joining Kudumbashree

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I turned down many opportunities to build up my career and social life for being a homemaker					
Later I regretted for not utilizing those opportunities					
I did have reservations on expressing my views on social and political issues					
Though I have freedom to express myself I preferred to go along with my family's political choices					
I had limited access to social clubs or organization					
I rarely attended political gatherings					
I never visited a government office unaccompanied					
I never attended Gram Sabha meetings as a Commoner					

Part III: Respondent's life as active Kudumbashree Participants

1. Name of the Neighborhood group you are in: _____
2. Date and Year of joining: _____
3. Official positions you held: _____
4. Current position; if you are holding any: _____
5. Indicators of economic empowerment after joining Kudumbashree:

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
My income/loan accessibility increased					
I have freedom to manage my finance					
I make a substantial profit out of income and credit					
My decisions regarding investments draw no criticism from other members of the family					

6. Indicators of socio-political empowerment after joining Kudumbashree

<i>(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)</i>					
Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I have developed thorough knowledge about my rights and duties as a citizen					
I started expressing my political opinions without fear					
I started expressing my concern on social issues openly					
I became an active member in a social club					
I started speaking in public gatherings					
My ability to communicate effectively has improved					
I started visiting government institutes/ banks more					
I started participating in social movements					
I became a known face in my neighborhood					
I started accepting challenging responsibilities					
My social acquaintances have been increased					
I successfully translated my expanded social network into votes					
I started attending Gram Sabha meetings regularly					
I started doing surveys on behalf of panchayat					
On behalf of Kudumbashree I started raising issues in Gram Sabha meetings					

Part IV: Respondent's life as Blooming Politicians/Panchayat Members

1. Your decision to contest in the election is:
 - ☐ Own decision
 - ☐ Compelled by someone
 - ☐ Political decision
 - ☐ As a replacement for your spouse/father due to women reservation
 - ☐ Any other, specify _____

2. Why did you choose to be involved with this particular political party?
 - ☐ a. Traditionally your family follows this party
 - ☐ b. This is the only party which offered you a seat
 - ☐ c. You and the party shared same ideology
 - ☐ d. Compelled by family members
 - ☐ e. Any other, specify _____

3. Does any of your family members hold any official positions in this party?
 - ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say

4. If Yes, is he/she an influential member in the party?
 - ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say

5. Do you have a family member who have contested in the panchayat election previously?
 - ☐ a. Spouse
 - ☐ b. Close relatives in your husband's family
 - ☐ c. Close relatives in your own family
 - ☐ d. Any other, specify _____
 - ☐ e. No

6. How long you have been a member in this party?
- ☐ a. 0-2 years
 - ☐ b. 2-4 years
 - ☐ c. 4- 6 years
 - ☐ d. above 6 years
7. Have you ever been known to others as an active member in the political party before your entry into panchayat level politics?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
8. Were you a part of campus or school politics?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
9. Have you participated in any kind of debates during school/ college life?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
10. Were you a part of any social/political movements during your tenure with Kudumbashree?
- ☐ a. As a participant in a political rally
 - ☐ b. In a protest against any social evils
 - ☐ c. As a participant in social/political conferences or seminars
 - ☐ d. As a resource person in any of the above programmes
 - ☐ e. As a think tank/writer/propagandist
 - ☐ f. Any other, specify-----
11. If there was no reservation, do you think that you would have been chosen to be a candidate?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say

12. From filing nomination papers till the oath taking ceremony who was your strongest support other than your immediate family members?

- ☐ a. Neighbor
- ☐ b. Party co-worker
- ☐ c. Family friend
- ☐ d. Any other; specify _____

13. How much time (average) do you spent in panchayat related work weekly?

- ☐ a. 0- 3 hours
- ☐ b. 3- 6 hours
- ☐ c. 6- 9 hours
- ☐ d. > 9 hours

14. How much time do you have to devote for Kudumbashree related work weekly?

- ☐ a. 0- 3 hours
- ☐ b. 3- 6 hours
- ☐ c. 6- 9 hours
- ☐ d. > 9 hours

15. Do you see it as a 'triple' burden (managing household duties, panchayat related works and Kudumbashree activities)?

- ☐ a. Yes
- ☐ b. No
- ☐ c. Can't say

16. Indicators to know how Kudumbashree exposure helped the respondents in delivering her responsibility effectively as a Panchayat member

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I used to get chances for public speaking in Kudumbashree					
Political discussions in weekly Kudumbashree meetings helped me to develop a political consciousness					
Social connections I've developed during my tenure with Kudumbashree helped me to build a strong vote base					
The panchayat visits I've paid as a Kudumbashree member had given me an overall idea about its functioning					
The rapport I've created with panchayat officials came handy once I became a member					
The experience with conflict resolution within the Kudumbashree has helped me to deal with conflicts in panchayat committee					
My tenure with the Kudumbashree enabled me to think beyond party lines and to work towards the betterment of women and children					
I became aware of existing gender injustice and discrimination					
I started questioning existing gender norms and social injustices after joining Kudumbashree					
Kudumbashree helped me to take a strong stand against unjust and uncivil practices in the society					
Kudumbashree colleagues remained as a strong pillar of support during the whole process of election					

17. Indicators to check if her social respectability has been increased or not after the election

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
People started recognizing me without the label of my father/spouse					
People started noticing my absence from public/family events					
There is a sharp increase in number of telephone calls I am getting daily					
People started asking my opinion even on matters not related to panchayat					
Family members started expressing their willingness to help with household chores					
Male members of the family started expressing their willingness to adjust their timings according to my schedule					
A sharp increase in the number of invitations I received for public/ family occasions					
People started inviting me to deliver public speeches					

18. Indicators to check if she lets her father/spouse/any other family members to handle panchayat matters on her behalf and to assess her equation with the party she belongs to

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	DA	SD
I discuss happenings in panchayat meetings in the house					
I seek father's/spouse's opinion on official matters					
I do not have opinions that contradicts party's view					
I will compromise with the party if such a difference of opinion jeopardizes my position in the party/ panchayat					
I choose not to voice my difference of opinion for the sake of family's well-being					
I am happy and content that I have a well-deserved position within the party					
I never encountered gender discrimination within the party					
I have been denied many opportunities on account of my gender					
I am confident that I have the capacity to win in the general category in the next election					
Party leadership is not ready to allocate two consecutive terms to a woman candidate fearing seat lose for male candidates					

19. Indicators to know the extent of her participation in Panchayat's functioning

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	DA	SD
I have the freedom to talk uninterruptedly in meetings					
I am capable to express my ideas effectively					
I feel that male members enjoy an upper hand in panchayat meetings					
As a woman member I face difficulties in convincing people that I am capable of delivering my duties effectively					
Male members and panchayat officials often ignore valuable suggestions from women members on account of their inexperience in the field					

20. According to you, how did your tenure with Kudumbashree help you in delivering your duties as a panchayat member/president effectively?

21. How did your experiences as a Kudumbashree member help you to confront the allegations (if any) by your opponents?

22. Do you think your experience in handling challenges in Kudumbashree has helped you to overcome challenges in Panchayat?

23. Are you planning to contest in next election?

- ☐ a. Yes
- ☐ b. No
- ☐ c. Can't say

If Yes, to which position?

- ☐ a. MP
- ☐ b. MLA
- ☐ c. District Panchayat
- ☐ d. Panchayat/municipality

If No, specify reason: _____

24. Would you like to share your future plans?

- ☐ a. Aspiring to be a full-time politician
- ☐ b. Go back to my previous occupation/life
- ☐ c. Political/social activist
- ☐ d. Not decided yet
- ☐ e. Any other, specify _____

25. Do you see your journey from an ordinary woman to a full-time politician as an empowering experience?

Annexure 2

Interview Schedule II

For Respondents without Kudumbashree background

This schedule has been formulated for women who are not a part of Kudumbashree Mission in Kottayam District of Kerala but are elected members of Panchayat. This research entitled **“Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in Politically Empowering Women in Kottayam District of Kerala”**, is to fulfill my doctorate degree in the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Telangana. I shall use this data strictly for my academic work and your answers would be kept confidential.

Jinu Francis

PhD. Research scholar (14SIPH06)

University of Hyderabad

Part I: Personal Details

(Instruction: Fill in the details or tick the correct option)

1. Name :
2. Age :
3. Address :
4. Religion :
5. Caste :

6. Marital Status : ☐ Married
☐ Unmarried
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
7. Educational Qualification: ☐ Matriculate
☐ Intermediate
☐ Graduate
☐ Post Graduate
☐ Other, specify _____
8. Occupation : ☐ Employed
☐ Home maker
☐ Student
☐ Self-employed
☐ Other, specify _____
9. Type of family: ☐ Joint
☐ Nuclear
☐ Single parent
☐ Other, specify _____
10. Family belongs to: ☐ BPL
☐ APL
☐ Not aware
11. Occupation of father/ husband:
12. Panchayat :
13. Ward :
14. Block :
15. Are you elected from a reserved seat for women? ☐ Yes
☐ No
16. Your position in the Panchayat: ☐ Ward member
☐ Vice. President
☐ President
☐ Other, specify _____
17. Since when have you been holding the above-mentioned position:
18. Names of the standing committees in the Panchayat, are you a part of:

19. Political affiliation, if any _____

☐ Independent

20. Is it your first term as a member? ☐ Yes
☐ No

21. If No, give following details:

a. Duration of the previous terms:

b. Was it from a reserved seat? ☐ Yes
☐ No

c. Have you held any particular positions of power during those terms?

Part II: Participant's Life before becoming Panchayat Members

1. Whether you had your own source of income?

☐ a. Yes

☐ b. No

If Yes, specify your monthly income

☐ a. Below Rs. 10,000

☐ b. Rs.10, 000 – 20,000

☐ c. Rs. 20,000 – 30,000

☐ d. Rs. 30,000- 40,000

☐ e. Rs. 40,000 and above

If No, whom you were depending on?

☐ a. Spouse

☐ b. Parents

☐ c. Children

☐ d. Any other, _____

2. Psychological effects of financial dependency (if you had a feeling that you were not contributing enough) before becoming a panchayat member

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I used to feel 'ashamed of my inability to contribute substantially towards monthly family expenses					
I used to refrain from buying personal goods due to financial constraints					
It kept me away from my family's decision making and lead roles					

3. Individual, Social and Political aspects before becoming a Panchayat Member

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I turned down many opportunities to build up my carrier for being a homemaker					
Later I regretted for not utilizing those opportunities					
I did have reservations on expressing my views on social and political issues					
Though I had freedom I preferred to go along with my family's political choices.					
I had only limited access to social clubs or organization					
I rarely attended political gatherings					
I never visited a government office unaccompanied					
I never attended Gram Sabha meetings as a commoner					

Part III: Respondents life as Blooming politicians/ Panchayat Members

1. Your decision to contest in the election is:
 - ☐ a. Own decision
 - ☐ b. Compelled by someone
 - ☐ c. Political decision
 - ☐ d. As a replacement for your spouse/father due to women reservation
 - ☐ e. Any other, specify _____

2. Why did you choose to be involved with this particular political party?
 - ☐ a. Traditionally your family follows this party
 - ☐ b. This is the only party which offered you a seat
 - ☐ c. You and the party shared same ideology
 - ☐ d. Compelled by family members
 - ☐ e. Any other, specify _____

3. Does any of your family members hold any official positions in this party?
 - ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say

4. If Yes, is he/she an influential member in the party?
 - ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say

5. Do you have a family member who have contested in the panchayat election previously?
 - ☐ a. Spouse
 - ☐ b. Close relatives in your husband's family
 - ☐ c. Close relatives in your own family
 - ☐ d. Any other, specify _____
 - ☐ e. No

6. How long you have been a member in this party?
- ☐ a. 0-2 years
 - ☐ b. 2-4 years
 - ☐ c. 4- 6 years
 - ☐ d. above 6 years
7. Have you ever been known to others as an active member in the political party before your entry into panchayat level politics?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
8. Were you a part of campus or school politics?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
9. Have you participated in any kind of debates during school/ college life?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
10. Have you heard of Kudumbashree initiative of Kerala government?
- ☐ a. Yes
 - ☐ b. No
 - ☐ c. Can't say
11. Is there any particular reason, for not joining Kudumbashree?
-
12. Were you a part of any social/political movements before joining politics?
- a. As a participant in a political rally
 - b. In a protest against any social evils
 - c. As a participant in social/political conferences or seminars
 - d. As a resource person in any of the above programmes
 - e. As a think tank/writer/propagandist
 - f. Never

13. If there was no reservation, do you think that you would have been chosen to be a candidate?

- ☐ a. Yes
- ☐ b. No
- ☐ c. Can't say

14. From filing nomination papers till the oath taking ceremony who was your strongest support other than your immediate family members?

- ☐ a. Neighbor
- ☐ b. Party co-worker
- ☐ c. Family friend
- ☐ d. Any other; specify _____

15. How much time (average) do you spent in panchayat related work weekly?

- ☐ a. 0- 3 hours
- ☐ b. 3- 6 hours
- ☐ c. 6- 9 hours
- ☐ d. > 9 hours

16. Do you see it as a 'double' burden (managing household duties and panchayat related works)?

- ☐ a. Yes
- ☐ b. No
- ☐ c. Can't say

17. Indicators to know the extent of inexperience with any social organisations when she landed on the job for the first time

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
As a first-time member in the panchayat, I had no idea about the functioning of panchayat					
I never handled leadership positions of any sort					
It was very difficult for me to say “NO” to a known person					
I had to spent a lot of time to get familiarize with the rules and regulations of the panchayat					
I depend a lot on my husband/father/any other influential member to get things done in panchayat					
I had difficulties while talking publicly					
During campaign I had to work hard to develop my vote base as I was not a familiar face in the community					
I was not particularly aware of the gender issues existing in our community					
I used to accept Party chief’s decisions without questioning its merits					
I find it very difficult to resolve conflicts between people as these things were new to me					
I missed the kind of support or camaraderie among Kudumbashree members during my campaign days					
I was not particularly aware of issues related to children till I became a member					
I noticed some of my colleagues who had been a part of Kudumbashree have prior knowledge regarding the functioning of Panchayats					
I had no idea about politics					
I find it very difficult to chair a meeting					

18. Do you think, it would have been helpful to carry out your duty more effectively, if you had worked in Kudumbashree

- ☐ a. Yes
☐ b. No
☐ c. Can't say

If Yes, how? _____

19. Indicators to check if her social respectability has been increased or not after the election

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
People started recognizing me without the label of my father/spouse					
People started noticing my absence from public/family events					
There is a sharp increase in number of telephone calls I am getting daily					
People started asking my opinion even on matters not related to panchayat					
Family members started expressing their willingness to help with household chores					
Male members of the family started expressing their willingness to adjust their timings according to my schedule					
A sharp increase in the number of invitations I received for public/ family occasions					
People started inviting me to deliver public speeches					

20. Indicators to check if she lets her father/spouse/any other family members to handle panchayat matters on her behalf and to assess her equation with the party she belongs to

(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I discuss happenings in panchayat meetings at home					
I seek father's/spouse's opinion on official matters					
I do not have opinions that contradicts party's view					
I will compromise with the party if such a difference of opinion jeopardizes my position in the party/ panchayat					
I choose not to voice my difference of opinion for the sake of family's well-being					
I am happy and content that I have a well-deserved position within the party					
I never encountered gender discrimination within the party					
I have been denied many opportunities on account of my gender					
I am confident that I have the capacity to win in the general category in the next election					
Party leadership is not ready to allocate two consecutive terms to a woman candidate fearing seat lose for male candidates					

21. Indicators to know the extent of her participation in Panchayat's functioning
(SA- Strongly Agree, A – Agree, NO- No Opinion, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree)

Statements	SA	A	NO	D	SD
I have the freedom to talk uninterruptedly in meetings					
I am capable to express my ideas effectively					
I feel that male members enjoy an upper hand in panchayat meetings					
As a woman member I face difficulties in convincing people that I am capable of delivering my duties effectively					
Male members and panchayat officials often ignore valuable suggestions from women members on account of their inexperience in the field					

22. Are you planning to contest in next election?

- ☐ a. Yes
☐ b. No
☐ c. Can't say

If Yes, to which position?

- ☐ a. MP
☐ b. MLA
☐ c. District Panchayat
☐ d. Panchayat/municipality

If No, specify reason _____

23. Would you like to share your future plans?

- ☐ a. Aspiring to be a full-time politician
☐ b. Go back to my previous occupation/life
☐ c. Political/social activist
☐ d. Not decided yet
☐ e. Any other, specify_____

24. As a first-time member of the panchayat, what kind of challenges have you been endured so far?

25. Do you see your journey from an ordinary woman to a full-time politician as an empowering experience?

- ☐ a. Yes
☐ b. No
☐ c. Can't say

Why? _____

Annexure 3

Factual Information Sheet

This schedule has been formulated for women who are not a part of Kudumbashree Mission in Kottayam District of Kerala but are elected members of Panchayat. This research entitled **“Poverty Alleviation to Participatory Citizenship: Role of Kudumbashree in Politically Empowering Women in Kottayam District of Kerala”**, is to fulfill my doctorate degree in the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Telangana. I shall use this data strictly for my academic work and your answers would be kept confidential.

Jinu Francis

PhD. Research scholar (14SIPH06)

University of Hyderabad

1. Name of the gram panchayat :
2. Block :
3. District :
4. Name of the Panchayat President :
5. Name of Vice President :
6. Total population of the panchayat
 - a. Number of males :
 - b. Number of females :
7. Sex ratio :

8. Confirm the existence of following facilities in the Panchayat

Institution	Existence	
Primary Health Centre/ Government medical facilities	☐ Yes	☐ No
Public Sector Bank	☐ Yes	☐ No
Anganwadi	☐ Yes	☐ No
Primary School	☐ Yes	☐ No
Secondary School	☐ Yes	☐ No
Fair price shops	☐ Yes	☐ No
MGNREGS Scheme	☐ Yes	No
Schemes to prevent Maternal mortality and infant mortality	☐ Yes	No
Any other Specific programme: _____		

9. Total number of wards :
10. No. of wards reserved for women :
11. No. of women members :
12. Number of women members associated with Kudumbashree mission before becoming Panchayat member:
13. What do you think of women members' ability to coordinate the functioning of panchayat committees?
-
14. If women members took a long period of time to get themselves familiarized with the duties and responsibilities of their position?
-
15. Respondent's comment on women member's ability to handle the pressure:
-
16. Do women members play an active role in resolving conflicts?

17. Have you noticed any significant differences between the style of functioning of a woman panchayat member who was an active Kudumbashree member for years and a woman member who was not part of the Kudumbashree mission?

Differences in the areas of....	Kudumbashree members	Non-Kudumbashree members
Time taken to get themselves familiarized with the rules and regulations of the panchayath		
Public speaking skills		
Conflict resolution skills		
Ability to adapt to new circumstances		
Ability to take up women centered issues		
Problem solving skills		
Level of involvement in panchayat meetings		
Social reach		

Annexure 4

Performa for Focus Group Discussion

1. Name of the Panchayat :
2. Date :
3. Time :
4. Details of participants

[illegible]



National Seminar
on
Sustainable Development : Concern and Issues
(With Special Reference to Gandhian Approach)

March 6-8, 2020

Certificate

This is to certify that Prof. / Dr. / Mr. / Ms. Jinu Francis affiliated to Hyderabad Central University has participated in the National Seminar on "Sustainable Development : Concern and Issues (With Special Reference to Gandhian Approach)" Organised by School of Studies in Anthropology, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur from March 6-8, 2020. He/She has Chaired a Session / Delivered Keynote Address / Participated / Presented a paper in the seminar, titled Government supported women empowerment and Political participation


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CERTIFICATE OF PRESENTATION

This certificate is presented to

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Academic Web Conference 2020”.

29th & 30th MAY 2020

Dr. Krithika
Moderator

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by Jinu Francis

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