



# Role of Entrepreneurship in Women Empowerment in Kerala

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

In the evolution of civilization, ideas and innovation have been the primary driving force for centuries. Mankind has evolved and maintained a plethora of ideas and inventions and has also succeeded through doing business as a culture. Entrepreneurship across today's modern paradigm has become one of the main economic forces of a nation like India. Women often engage alongside men in the business sector for the major contribution to a country's economy. Women's exposure to socio-economic aspects has improved their livelihoods several times over the last three decades. Various government policies, social recognition and other causes have cleared the stigma about woman entrepreneurs. Women's empowerment has seen a steep rise in Kerala through entrepreneurship policies, schemes, regulations and implementations. Besides the successes, women often experience hardships such as financial difficulties and social recognition. Women engaging in entrepreneurship often appear to be less empowered, but the scenario is different. This paper discusses the successful role of entrepreneurship in empowering women in Kerala. Kudumbashree Community Network, or simply Kudumbashree, is one such project to empower women's lives through entrepreneurship. Initiated by the Government of Kerala, Kudumbashree explicitly illustrates that it has contributed a great deal to women empowerment over the past three decades.

**Keywords:** Women Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Kerala, Economy, Kudumbashree

## Introduction:

Entrepreneurship is either carried out individually or by a group of people and is purely an economical practice that uplifts a nation. Entrepreneurship is the mechanism to organize, start, and manage a new enterprise, which at the start is often a small company. Robert K.Lamb (1954) presented the following definition as "Entrepreneurship is that form of social decision making performed by economic innovators."Lamb defines entrepreneurship as an act of economic action dedicated to creativity. It also emphasizes the social orientation of entrepreneurship as it contributes to social welfare and well-being. Thereafter, many changes occurred and today's modern world approaches Entrepreneurship as a function of Leadership as depicted by Schumpeter. Women Entrepreneurship has gained new momentum in this decade which empowers women to be self-dependent and self-reliant. There are five components in Women's empowerment namely, the sense of self-esteem, right to options and choices, right to access prospects and assets, right to manage one's existence in and beyond the home and their opportunity to affect societal reform to establish a more egalitarian economic and social order in both national and international arena as described by Killby (1971).

Learning, guidance, awareness-raising, self-confidence, improved access to leverage of services, efforts to change gender segregation and inequality-building processes are the various effective ways that can empower the women to move their rights forward. In India, the emancipation of women was not very much valued during the post-Independence period and women's entrepreneurship later limited itself to the agro-food industry such as spices processing, juice production, incense sticks making and pickle making. However in various fields, including engineering and medicine, women entrepreneurship has evolved steadily over a year. Therefore, entrepreneurship plays a major role in the empowerment of women. In a state like Kerala

which has a wealth of natural resources in abundance, women are involved in the various other sectors of entrepreneurship such as the agro-food industry, technological startups, production and management as opined by Suman Madan and et al (2014). Women are more fortunate in Kerala than the other Indians. The government has a high literacy rate for women. More than 87% of women in Kerala are professionals. Kerala is also one of the few states with more women than men and that too with 87% women literacy rate. The State, though, was just 6.2 percent women, out of 1.6 million small businesses, according to data obtained in 1987. Efforts to support women have risen more than fivefold. Most studies indicate that women in Kerala have taken initiatives because it was income-generating, encouraged by their spouse, or through the availability of many governmental/non-governmental funds. A similar study also indicates that women facing challenges primarily include fund mobility, administration, marketing and payment delays. Kerala's business sector is shifting subtly today. As a historically male-dominated area, nowadays, it can be seen that the existence of many cheerful and optimistic young women entrepreneurs who not only made an impression on the economy but changed both their lives and the lives of others. There are approximately 0.6 million units run by women entrepreneurs out of 2.6 million Small Scale Industries (SSI) and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Kerala, as shown in the below figure 1.1. This indicates that in Kerala, about 25 percent of the business economy is run by women.



**Figure 1.1: SSI/MSME units in Kerala  
Scope and Objectives of the research**

The overarching misconception and societal strata that women are still suppressed by the opposite gender is shattered by Women's entrepreneurship. Women are involved in several diverse fields of industry, thereby benefiting their communities. Women Entrepreneurship has empowered women in every possible way. Several policies and frameworks have been implemented by the government and other agencies. This research paper explores the government policies that have empowered women in Kerala through entrepreneurship. The main objective of this research is to illustrate how entrepreneurship has empowered the lives of women in the state of Kerala.

### **Women Entrepreneurship in Kerala**

The role of women in entrepreneurship has recently altered society's entire framework. In Kerala, women have a greater influence on the development of the social and economic position of the state. According to Desai (2003), a woman entrepreneur is expected to perform the following functions such as risk-taking, decision making, managerial responsibilities, conceiving innovative ideas. As a result of urbanization, development and sovereignty, women in Kerala, whose literacy rate is far more than women in other states are progressing towards empowerment and are finding profit in their venture. Therefore, they have a double vested interest as a typical household and as a parent at home and also contend with other men in industry and commerce. In such a scenario, Ganeshan S, (2003) has considered to recognize the essential technologies that will make it possible for a woman to function as a successful entrepreneur without disrupting her goals.

### **Problems Faced by Women Entrepreneurs**

Women are usually burdened with numerous roles rather than males. Therefore, of course, women are always prone to problems, not to mention women entrepreneurs who encounter difficulties to a larger degree. Nirmala Karuna D'Cruz, (2003) proposed that societal challenges, emotional tribulations, family problems are the peer pressure that women entrepreneurs face. Freedom of movement and gender discrimination as confined by Sunitha Joseph, (2018) are two major problems that arise due to community. Hayfaa A. Tlaiss, (2014) proposed that lack of support from their spouses and in-laws in the household chores is also a major hurdle present in the family. This often leads to depression and ultimately failure in their entrepreneurial venture. Chhichhia, V., (2004) proposed that health conditions and malnutrition also contribute to fast aging problems. There are also other strategic problems experienced by women

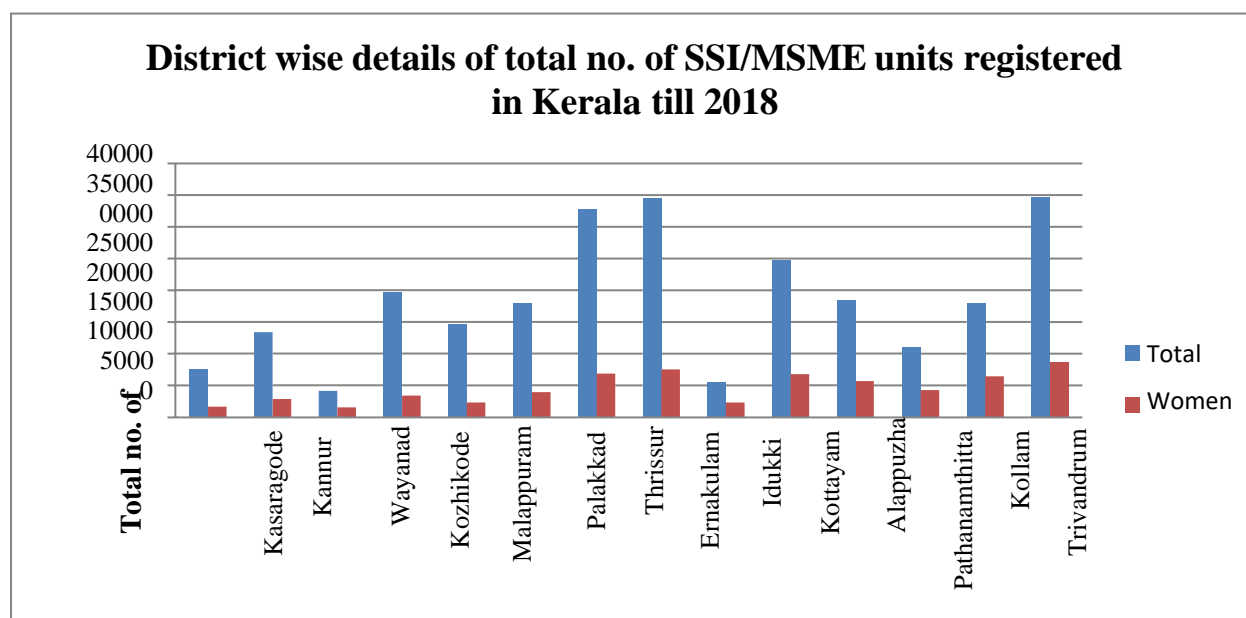
entrepreneurs.

Wrong product range, fraudulent advice from fake machinery companies, lack of expertise in enterprise manufacturing, inadequate technological support, lack of capital funding, inefficient business plans are the few tactical challenges woman entrepreneurs encounter as emphasized by Manjula R Iyer (2018).

**Table 1.1 District wise details of total working SSI/MSME units Registered in Kerala up to Sep 2018**

S.No.	District	Number of SSI/MSME units promoted		Total Investments (in Lakhs)	Values of goods and services produced(inLakhs)
		Total	Women		
1	Kasaragode	7580	1675	39543.77	73823.05
2	Kannur	13419	2857	80913.79	227219.32
3	Wayanad	4113	1524	25864.46	75690.53
4	Kozhikode	19782	3418	133190.95	434762.45
5	Malappuram	14552	2277	98555.92	227542.23
6	Palakkad	17970	3984	144213.35	448984.99
7	Thrissur	32849	6911	185008.35	561216.26
8	Ernakulam	34497	7539	377620.95	1289572.68
9	Idukki	5613	2281	51767.9	1294737.06
10	Kottayam	24771	6788	129716.38	299029.1
11	Alappuzha	18489	5737	116357.65	252134.8
12	Pathanamthitta	11136	4226	88041.4	181238.19
13	Kollam	18036	6479	127592.5	1018236.24
14	Thiruvananthapuram	34659	8597	200259.01	380957.03
	<b>Total</b>	<b>257466</b>	<b>64293</b>	<b>1798646.38</b>	<b>6765143.93</b>

Table 1.1 depicts the District wise details of total working SSI/MSME units Registered in Kerala up to September 2018. This table shows that Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Palakkad, and Kollam have extremely high investments in the business sector through entrepreneurship.



**Figure 1.2: District wise details of total no. of SSI/MSME units registered in Kerala till 2018**

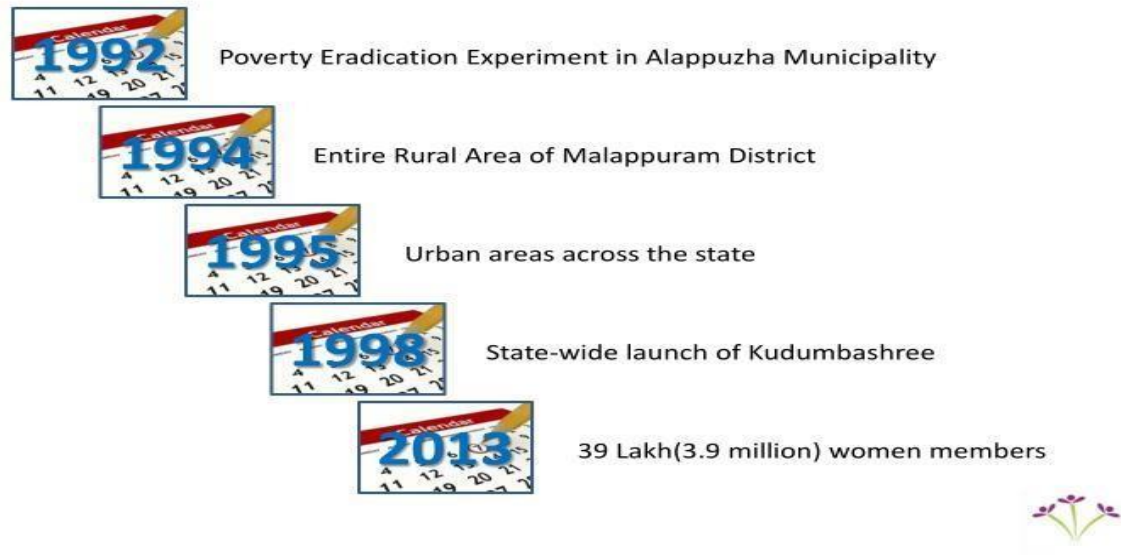
The value of goods or services produced is also tremendously increased when compared to the initial investments made. Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Kozhikode, and Kannur have managed to increase their value proposition to many folds when compared to the other districts. The total value proposition in Kerala has increased three folds to their initial investments.

The figure 1.2 shows the cumulative number of SSI / MSME units employed in different Kerala districts up to 2018. It is seen that relative to the other districts of Kerala, districts like Idukki, Pathanamthitta, Wayanad, Kollam, Alappuzha have nearly more than 35 percent of women entrepreneurs. Mallapuram and Kozhikode, on the other hand, report the lowest of about 17 percent of women's entrepreneurial units.

### Kudumbashree Community Network

The Government of Kerala has built many strategic solutions to the diverse challenges faced by woman entrepreneurs. Kudumbashree is one of the schemes initiated in 1992 by the government of Kerala. Since then, a variety of improvements has been made to the initiative and has developed as a dynamic platform to improve and inspire women's entrepreneurial existence.

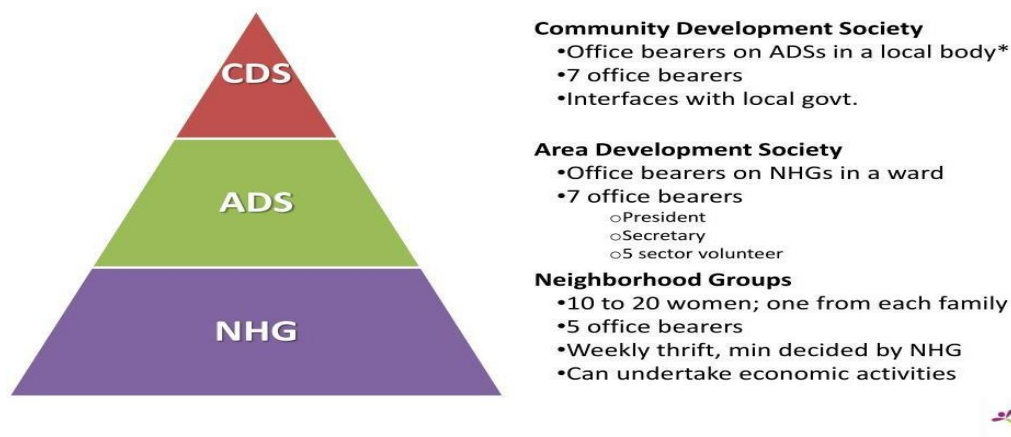
## The Evolution



**Figure 1.3: Evolution of Kudumbashree**

Kudumbashree is a program initiated by Kerala's State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) to alleviate poverty and empower women which is also emphasized by Susan Chirayath, (2010). In the Malayalam language, the word Kudumbashree refers to 'family prosperity'. The evolution and various timeline of the Kudumbashree are depicted in figure 1.3.

## Understanding Kudumbashree



**Figure 1.4: Kudumbashree – A detailed analysis**

The Kudumbashree Community Network or the Kudumbashree Mission, could mean the same what is widely referred to as 'Kudumbashree'. Kudumbashree has three main regions of interest as shown in figure 1.4 with Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. In 2011, Kudumbashree was acknowledged by the Government of India's Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

Kudumbashree has become one of the world's largest women's networks, strongly oriented to democratic leadership as elucidated by Ebrahim Kunju Sulaiman (2014). The Community Development Society (CDS) is the leading institution of the Kudumbashree that serves as an interface between urban/rural business units and local authorities. It provides female entrepreneurs with advice on financial support, policy development, decision-making, training in business strategies and other required mentoring. Economic empowerment, social empowerment and gender empowerment are the three key areas on which Kudumbashree is focussing.

### **Women Empowerment**

One of Kudumbashree's initiatives is Tribal Apparel Park in the district of Wayanad which claims to be one of the women's entrepreneurship empowerment events. To achieve their growth and self-sustainability and meet their communities through them, Kudumbashree's policies for the wellbeing of the tribal women seek to help them develop decent lives and further enhance their lifestyle and standard of living.

The Tribal Apparel Park has been established for the tribal communities living in the colonies to provide livelihoods for women living in Kaniyambatta Panchayath, Wayanad. They received training in stitching cloth bag, churidar top, embroidery, nursing coat, pillow cover, saree blouse, etc. between 2018 and 2019. And since February 2020, the units are in operation. The Kudumbashree Wayanad District's Tribal Apparel Park has now been a blueprint for other District Missions. The Kudumbashree Wayanad District Mission and the Kudumbashree Mission are one of the best enterprise models in empowering women.

### **Women in Kerala Politics**

In the emancipation and empowerment of women, Kudumbashree plays a pivotal role. Amidst the pandemic, Kerala witnessed the local body polls in late 2020. The government of Kerala has reserved 50% seats for women in elections. In the electoral process, a total of 21,854 representatives were elected to represent 1,199 state government entities, including gram panchayat, block panchayat, district panchayat, municipalities and corporations. Among them, around 11,000 are women and around 7058 women were elected representatives. Among them, 30 percent of women belong to the Kudumbashree community network. Henceforth it can be noted that Kudumbashree has become a game-changer in the plight of women in Kerala and has tried to strengthen the sociopolitical representation of women.

Kudumbashree community network even left its imprints in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in the Kasaragod district of Kerala. They have this rare opportunity to showcase their entrepreneurial strengths. During the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections, Kudumbashree Mission has collaborated with the office of Chief Electoral Officer, Kerala (CEO) to offer various services. The Kudumbashree Mission, through this alliance, sought to incorporate women into the political process, ensuring total equality of women in every field of life. Some of the services provided by them are teaching people their civic responsibility, supplying water and food facilities during the election process and setting up polling stations. Buyer-Seller meet, Transgender canteen, Tribal women upliftment, Job fairs, Hunger free Kottayam, services during a natural calamity or during election time, providing care at elderly and orphanage homes are a few other services to mention by Kudumbashree community network.

### **Gramakiranam - Annual Maintenance Contract:**

Cultural bias and sexism remain one of the key taboos of women's entrepreneurship and women's empowerment. This is shattered by the district mission of Kasaragod by equipping women to do jobs that men are usually supposed to do. Gramakiranam is the indigenous scheme followed in Kasaragod district which is a part of the microenterprise unit. The Kudumbashree Women of Kasaragod began even climbing the electric posts and making LED lamps, spurring the power inside them! In addition to taking women to the forefront, the latest initiative put out by the Kudumbashree Kasaragod District Mission has also demonstrated that no job is difficult for women and proved gender is not an obstacle to women's progress. It has accomplished major milestones two years after the start of the initiative. These women even obtained an annual maintenance contract for the replacement and restoration of LED lamps for a few places in this district. This shows that many myths are devastated and women are strongly participating in this project, which shows the growth of women's empowerment in this district once again.

### **Conclusion:**

Women are always granted subordinate status in the family in the traditional Indian culture. Women are often deemed the weaker sex by Indian culture. For a long time, sociological and cultural traditions and taboos have kept women dormant. But these are shattered by women themselves by the support of various NGO's, Government policies and various reformers. Women are interested in many different areas not only confined to food production, but they are also into education, pharmaceuticals, textile industry, leather industry, horticulture, farming and even ventured into avionics. This shows women have taken up several occupations and revenue streams. When they were limited to four walls doing just domestic tasks, days went by. About the chauvinistic aspects, women have readily embraced challenging professions these days. The government of Kerala's Kudumbashree project is one such program that promotes the lives of millions of women in their entrepreneurial career by leading them in all possible ways. It can be claimed that



Kudumbashree has made a great impact on the lives of women and women empowerment in Kerala.

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