

**ROLE OF KUDUMBASHREE IN THE POLITICAL
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN - A STUDY WITH
REFERENCE TO LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT
INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA**

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FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

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This chapter presents the research Findings, Suggestions and Recommendations for the problem under study, the theoretical and practical implications of the study is included in this chapter. Conclusion of the study is also incorporated along with scope for further research.

Chapter 5 has detailed the results of analysis. In this chapter the findings and implications are summarized. In tune with the research objectives, this chapter is structured into various sections. The entire study was conducted to understand the Political Empowerment of EWR's in LSGI who were once part of the SHG, Kudumbasree. For this purpose, the socio-demographic profile of the EWR's, the profile of them while in Kudumbasree, influence of Kudumbasree on them for developing and enhancing the skills required, which lead to Political Empowerment etc. were studied. This chapter discusses the implications and findings regarding factors regarding each of the above in the Political Empowerment of the EWRs. In addition, this chapter also suggests future research directions and finally provides concluding remarks to this research study.

Participation in the development which is defined as the effective role in decision making and implementation from the stage of conception to that of execution of local development schemes are viewed from two perspectives – quality and quantity. Quantity of participation refers to the strength and trend in participation of various groups like gender, economic position, religion etc. Quality is the one which is related to empowerment.

7.1 Findings based on Socio-demographic Profile

- Age of the respondents ranges 22 to 65, of which 4.4% belong to the age group of less than 30 years, 49.1% in the age group of 30 to 40, another 35.3% in the age group of 40 to 50 and 11.1% in the age group greater than 50years.

- Classification according to Educational qualification reveals that most of the EWRs fall in either two categories – primary education (37.6%) or degree (34.7%). It can be concluded that all of them had the capacity to read the Panchayati Raj Act which contains the rules and regulations and matters related to administration in LSGIs
- Majority of the EWRs are Hindus followed by Christians and Muslims.
- Majority of the EWRs are married and around 12.2% is divorced and 5.1% is unmarried.
- Majority of the EWRs hail from nuclear family and 12% from Joint family followed by a few percentage who are staying single as spinsters.
- The economic Status of majority of EWRs is above poverty level.
- Majority of the EWRs are having an experience of more than 10 years in Kudumbasree
- Majority of them was holding the position of an office bearer in Kudumbasree like – President, Secretary, Health& Education Volunteer, Income generation volunteer, Infrastructure volunteer, ADS Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, CDS Chairperson, CDS Vice Chairperson, Secretary.

- 61% of the EWRs were homemakers while they were part of Kudumbasree.
- Except for 13.3% of EWRs, all the others reported that they had contested in LSG elections because of their experience in Kudumbasree. The indicators of female literacy, maternal mortality rate, sex ration are all way better than other states in India. But, as can be seen from many studies, women's presences in decision making bodies are really poor. There comes the importance of the Gender Self Learning Program of Kudumbasree which has an innovative pedagogy for making the women understand her role and position in the society critically.

7.2 Findings based on Hypothesis

- Political Empowerment of EWRs is different across Age, Educational Qualification, Marital status and Religion.
- Political Empowerment of the EWRs is different across the family type (Nuclear /Joint).
- Also Political Empowerment of EWRs is different across the number of years of experience in Kudumbasree.
- Evaluative judgment, a skill developed from being in Kudumbasree significantly influence Political Empowerment of the EWRs. The administrative knowledge of Kudumbasree women are a notch higher than her counterparts in Panchayath. Active involvement in activities like formulating CDS action

plan, experience of acting as a liaison between ward member and people etc have helped Kudumbasree women to have prior knowledge of Panchayath they are working in. Other Kudumbasree training like training for CDS chairpersons, and camps, seminars organised by other organisations convert these women to public citizen from an individual. Women can understand and comprehend government orders and projects.

- Self Confidence, a skill developed from being in Kudumbasree significantly influence Political Empowerment of the EWRs. Women were always accompanied by a male relative or a party member during her Panchayath works and field visits. However, Panchayath members with Kudumbasree background work independently and without any outside support.
- Sociability, a skill developed from being in Kudumbasree significantly influence Political Empowerment of the EWRs. Kudumbasree women's active involvement in projects like collective farming and participation in regular Kudumbasree meeting have helped to enhance their people skills.
- The Political Empowerment of EWRs with Kudumbasree background is greater than that of EWRs without Kudumbasree background. Hence Not only has Kudumbasree focused on eradicating poverty, it has also equally focused on the overall capability enhancement of women. Kudumbasree has given ample space and opportunity for a woman to lead her family out of the clutches of poverty and also to develop herself.

Bayeh (2016) in the study has stated that empowering women and providing them with fair representation across different decision-making levels of the government structure to better protect women's interests and to achieve quality governance. Inglehart & Norris,(2003) their study in political scientists examining the cross-cultural development of gender equity argue that women must experience personal change before relational power distributions can Oommen (2017) admitted that politics in Kerala was “a masculine affair” He also blamed the attitude of men towards women in local government bodies on a feudal mindset. According to him men take critical decisions in the majority of local self-government institutions. He agreed that women should influence the decision-making process more as they formed the majority of elected members. Unfortunately, women representatives in local governments in Kerala have not become a critical force in the decision-making process. Positioning of women in a Panchayath office amidst a highly patriarchal structure is one of the hindrances they face. Notwithstanding the presence of powerful women in the political elite, for the vast majority, the triple burdens of gender, class and caste/religion, overlaid with the power of patriarchy, renders the Constitutional promise of gender equality more symbolic than substantive. Radha & Chowdhury (2002) in their study has stated that the three levels at which women in Kerala can participate and thereby be empowered in local planning are

- (i) Passive participation, which includes mere attendance in meetings in *Ayalkoottams* and *Gramasabhas* without taking up any leadership roles or availing decision making powers,

- (ii) Active Participation in the form of committee members and conveners.
- (iii) Decisive Participation as participants with powers to take decisions or enforce views.

The EWRs in the Local Self Government Institutions, who have come from Kudumbasree has been active and decisive participants while in the Neighbourhood groups and hence that has helped them to take up the positions and manage things judiciously. Moreover they have the inherent leadership and the confidence they have gained from Kudumbasree where they were holding various leadership positions. Also in Local Self Government Institutions, seats are reserved for women. Though there are dual opinion regarding concept of reservation policy for enhancing women empowerment, it's observed that women are found very rarely in these bodies except as co-opted members who were accorded little power, respect or political status. In LSGIs, there are reservations of seats for women. Status of women in India is determined by caste-class configuration. There have been arguments for and against the concept of reservation policy as a tool for woman empowerment. The reservation was necessary because women were rarely on these bodies, except as co-opted members who were accorded little power, respect or political status.

Kerala, though being a state with highest HDI (0.625) as per the UNDP 2011 report, this progress was not well reflected in the political sphere. Active involvement of women in various leadership levels was

virtually lacking. Evelin (2004) has stated in his study that though reservations and quotas are actually a precondition for empowerment, presence of women groups also influences a lot as then empowerment will be easier and faster. There comes the importance of Kudumbasree. Not only has Kudumbasree focused on eradicating poverty, it has also equally focused on the overall capability enhancement of women. Ample space and opportunity for a woman is given by Kudumbasree and this enables the women to lead her family out of the clutches of poverty. This also enables an overall development of the ladies.

Kudumbasree has been instrumental in redefining the elected women representative's characteristics in the state. The weekly meetings and the regular trainings has enabled women to look at her environment and recognize her strength and potential. She is able to handle things confidently and alter her self-image tremendously. The process has ensured the social and democratic capability enhancement. Being an officer bearer in Kudumbasree and leading a group of women and her family is nothing less than a Panchayath President who leads a few thousand families is how a woman describes her experience after assuming roles of leadership within Kudumbasree. Today women in Kerala have become true partners in the democratic process and are fearlessly involved in questioning, criticizing and arguing which is a clear sign of a community realizing its rights and privileges. Hence Kudumbasree has been the platter from which the contestants for the Local Self Government Elections in Kerala have been selected.

7.3 Suggestions

- Being involved in Kudumbasree has brought in significant changes in the way women were perceived in the society. Not only have women been economically empowered But, she has also been socially strengthened. Things which seemed completely inaccessible now seem to have become an integral part of their lives. Unlike women in normal politics, where they get little chance of advancement by deprioritizing women's issues within the party, CDS training by Kudumbasree has strengthened the efficacy of women representatives, thereby underscoring the potential in links between women in civil society and those in formal politics. The women who have joined Kudumbasree in their 20's are now in their middle ages and in order to sustain their momentum Kudumbasree should try to bring out activities and projects for these women to stay relevant in changing times thereby enhancing women empowerment.
- In addition, women need to challenge the gender roles which leave most domestic responsibilities in their hands. Women need to negotiate for sharing of domestic responsibilities with other family members in order to have time to focus on careers for instance political careers if they so wish to. Support from family is the most important factor. Technological advancements like online facilities, audio visual aids, programs like radio, television etc. will boost the women empowerment and development strategies.

- More cooperation from government officials is required for the smooth functioning of the Panchayath/Municipality/Corporation of the EWR.
- There could be consultation day exclusively for EWRs in the government offices where the EWRs get information and resolve their issues.
- EWRs are dependent on male colleagues and they do not feel free to express their view in front of others, suggesting that for initial phases, training programs exclusively for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) would be more appropriate.
- Women dominated local body finds it difficult to get even the allotted funds for the various schemes when compared to Male dominated local body. Unlike men, they cannot spend long hours away from home, lobbying for funds with the male-dominated network of higher officials.
- Lobbying demands time, effort and access to officials of the district collectorate. Women have a tougher time investing in these. Men go and sit with them for a long time and ensure funding. A way of tackling this would be performance oriented budgeting and avail the online facilities rather than face to face submission of applications.
- Politics of representation didn't transform to politics of participation in all situations. What was generally lacking was the will power and understanding of women about their position and the society around them. The 'conscious raising

phenomenon was missing'. Gender Self Learning training can act as a medium to capacitate women to come to public sphere and hold positions of power. To overcome the paradox of Kerala's development in all social indicators, But, low representation and status of women in decision making bodies, it is important to achieve gender equality and gender justice. Hence it is imperative to create a women friendly atmosphere in all sections of society.

Society should create more space for women in governance and help them adapt the system and policies according to gender need .This will help to actualize the empowerment in the political arena in a more meaningful manner.

Kudumbasree's success in Kerala in developing socially conscious women with great leadership and decision making ability is celebrated as a unique model across the world. Replicating the same in other states may not be possible due to socio cultural contexts of other states.

7.4 Implications of the Study

7.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study theoretically contribute to the creation of a framework which gives an idea of how democracy becomes meaningful with effective participation of women in decision making. This study has also initiated an examination of the women participation in politics at local levels of the government and contribute to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

7.4.2 Practical Implications

The numbers of women in legislatures/decision making bodies is not an indicator of quality. But, their impact and efficiency makes a difference. The study helps in identifying the determinants of political empowerment at the grass root level and the various ways in which the political empowerment can be improved. More women in the decision making bodies will ensure more women related problems will be addressed. By keeping this in mind, practitioners and policy makers can understand how they might construct tools that help them mold the women and make them able leaders in the society, thereby leading to a development by women having transparency, longevity and credibility at the core.

Policies thus need to move beyond focusing solely on the mechanisms and institutional design of poverty alleviation programs, to also consider the political contexts within which such interventions take place.

7.5 Conclusion

The large scale presentation of Kudumbasree women has been a welcome step in regard to the engendering of these power spaces. Through this process, the poor women have become active participants in the planning, implementation process of various anti-poverty programmes. The Panchayath work was preceded by Kudumbasree experience for these elected women representatives. Their decision making capacity, people skills, administrative knowledge, network

strength, societal commitment are a notch higher than their counterparts from non-Kudumbasree background. Women from Kudumbasree in Panchayats have shown initiative and drive to fight against the social issues in their Panchayats. The study tried to understand how elected women representatives with a Kudumbasree background are different from that of an elected women representative without Kudumbasree background. They give special attention to use the women development fund effectively and have taken focused measures to curb alcoholism, domestic violence etc. The Study confirms that Kudumbasree is an instrument in enhancing the Political Empowerment of women. The Skills acquired through Kudumbasree especially the Evaluative judgment influences Political Empowerment the most. Kerala women have become true partners in the democratic process and are fearlessly involved in questioning, criticizing and arguing which is a clear sign of a community realizing its rights and privileges.

The ‘moralistic gaze’ which comes to the foray when women are actively participating in public sphere is slowly changing towards good. The baggage of moral righteousness in public carried by women is reduced as men also recognize that women are working for the societal good. Kudumbasree activities have enhanced women’s acceptance and power in society.

7.6 Inter Disciplinary Relevance and Scope for Further Research

The present study is on the Political empowerment of women from Kudumbasree through participation in grass root politics. The study on

women empowerment, especially their participation and role performance in decision making and implementation, planning and developmental activities, with their social, Economic and political background at the grass root level, has a great sociological relevance. It has great relevance to political Science because it would provide us with first-hand knowledge on the role of women in politics, especially in grass root politics in a changing society. Thus, the present study has tried to fill the gap of our understanding of society-Panchayath linkage pertaining to women which is directly relevant to Political Science, Political Sociology, Social Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology and History etc. Hence, the study is essentially interdisciplinary and can be used to study further in these disciplines.

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