

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF EMPOWERMENT – A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT ICT PROGRAMMES AMONGST WOMEN IN KERALA

*A Thesis submitted
in partial fulfilment for the Degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Suffering is the essence of success.

- *Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam*

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Social Construction of Empowerment – A Study on the Impact of Government ICT programmes amongst Women in Kerala** submitted by **Rashmi M.** to the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is a *bona fide* record of research work carried out by her under my supervision. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institution or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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May, 2017

Counter signature of HOD with seal

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled **Social Construction of Empowerment – A study on the impact of Government ICT programmes amongst Women in Kerala** submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is a record of original work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Lekshmi V. Nair.**, and has not formed the basis for the award of any other degree or diploma, in this or any other Institution or University. In keeping with the ethical practice in reporting scientific information, due acknowledgements have been made wherever the findings of others have been cited.

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ABSTRACT

Women have increasingly proven to be active and enthusiastic participants in a large variety of ICT enabled projects, such as computer training and data entry facilities, call centres, billing, computer repair work, and e-enabled businesses. The significance of such programmes are in its ability to outreach several households because social, economic and political uplift of women will have implications on the coming generations as well. The study was done in the context of the state of Kerala. The study targeted those ICT programmes constructed and designed for women. The research commences by reviewing the underlying agendas on empowerment programmes which utilize ICT as a tool. In the state of Kerala, only one ICT programme for women was discovered which was initiated by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM)) or popularly known as *Kudumbashree* Mission. Further discussions accentuated the specific role played by the IT enterprises in the social system of its women beneficiaries.

The analytical capabilities and methodological apparatus of actor – network theory was used to comprehend the formation of Kudumbashree IT Enterprises. The factors of empowerment were also studied along with the issues which constrained and liberated their action. The theoretical lens of the study is built upon the aspects of neo-institutionalism, functional simplification, empowerment and sociology of translation. The concepts used for the study were operationally defined using indicators obtained through secondary sources and discussions with the subject experts, key informants and authors.

The arguments are made using interpretive case study of Kudumbashree IT enterprise. The research has employed both qualitative and quantitative data for the better understanding of the field of study. The findings showcase a process of adaptation which leads to the induction of women into the process of empowerment. The research indicates that such ICT interventions are helpful in terms of uplifting women socially, economically and politically. The study has also critically discussed the process of empowerment by analysing data obtained from the ground.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Actor – Network Theory
B2C	Business to Consumer
CDS	Community Development Society
DMC	District Mission Coordinator
DTH	Direct to Home
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRIENDS	Fast Reliable Instant Efficient Network for Disbursement of Services
G2C	Government – to – Citizen
GOI	Government of India
GOK	Government of Kerala
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KITE	Kudumbashree IT Enterprise
KM	Kudumbashree Mission
KSRTC	Kerala State Road Transport Corporation
KSSP	Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad
LDF	Left Democratic Front
LPG	Liquid Petroleum Gas
LSGD	Local Self – Government Department
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NHG	Neighbourhood Group
NICNET	National Informatics Centre Network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SHG	Self Help Group
SPEM	State Poverty Eradication Mission
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Technology is a primary mechanism for promoting economic modernization and enhancing standards of living. Development was unquestionably the goal, and using technologies of the industrialized nations, the most efficient avenue (Bourque and Warren, 1987). Technology does not determine social processes and institutions. It can be considered as a mediating factor in a complex interactional environment between social structures, social actors, and their socially constructed tools, including technology. In their ‘millennial’ reflections many sociologists during the beginning of the 21st century, considered technology as the impetus for most fundamental of social trends and transformations (Wajcman, 2002). The new technological paradigm based on information and communication technologies (ICTs) emerged as a systemic requirement during the 1970s. It expanded to the domains of military power, financial transactions and technology manufacturing in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, it got diffused in homes and culture with the explosive penetration of internet and multimedia. These technologies have far reaching social implications as information, communication and knowledge processing are the core of human action which add specific social effects to the broader pattern of social causation. This study has focussed on one such social implication concerned with ICT programmes that has the potential for leading women to empowerment. This chapter introduces the study and also discusses the prime motivation behind this research.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) extend from print media and fixed line telephones to satellite technology and the internet. The spectrum of what may be seen as ICTs includes ‘a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, distribute, process and

transform information’ (Marcelle, 2000). The ICT sector consists of sections as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio, computer hardware and software, computer services and internet as well as the content of these media. In a study by Gurumurthy (2004), references to ‘old’ and ‘new’ technologies have been mentioned. Old technologies include non-electronic media like print and analogue technologies where information is transmitted bit-by-bit using electronic wave like radio. New technologies refer to digital technologies where information is transmitted all in one go by digits, like computers, the internet, electronic mail and multimedia. Old technologies still play a major role in meeting the information and communication needs of a large majority.

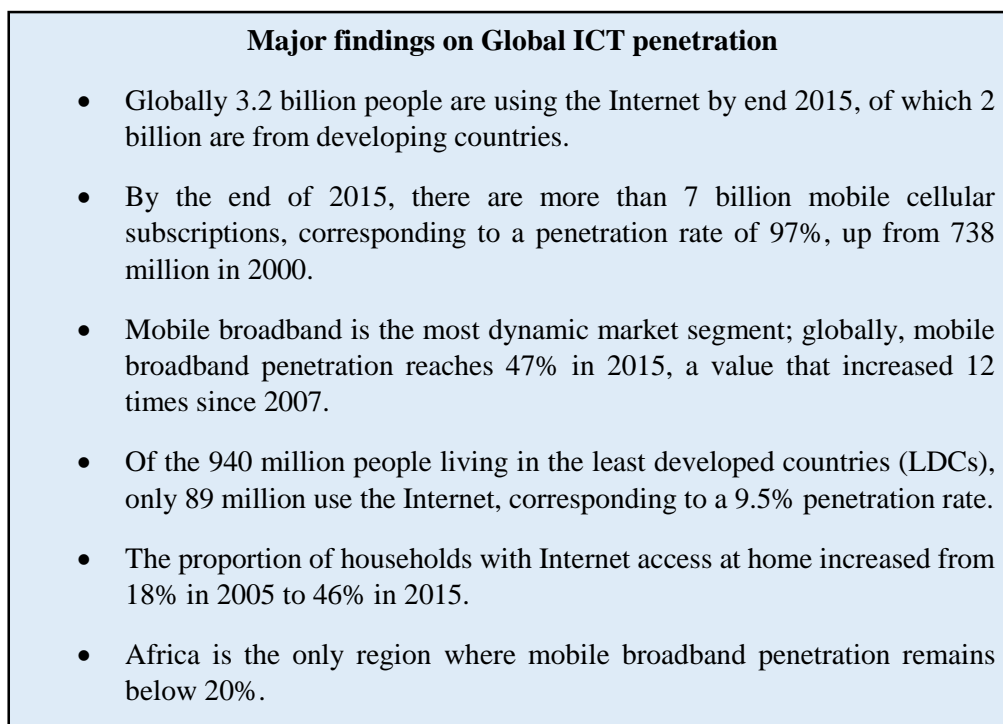


Figure 1.1. Major findings on Global ICT penetration from ITU (2015)

Information and communication technologies have undeniable potential to increase productivity of almost all economic sectors, to overcome problems of dysfunctional administration, to expand and improve the service (Avgerou, 1998). These ICTs are expected to play a key role in developing poor countries (Sahay and Avgerou, 2002). In the 1990s the entire planet was organized around telecommunicated networks of computers at the heart of information systems and communication processes. The entire realm of human activity depends on the power

of information, in a sequence of technological innovation that accelerates its pace by month (Castells, 1999). In a report of ITU (2015), some of the factors which showcase the penetration of ICT have been explained. The Figure 1.1 shows some of the major finding of the ITU report.

Development of new softwares has led in the progression of knowledge gathering and easy computing which in turn creates wealth much faster than any previous generation. Literatures on ICT focus on internet as a medium addressing the gender issues in the developing countries (Hafkin and Huyer, 2007; Gurumurthy, 2004). ICTs are increasingly promoted as a key solution for comprehensive development, poverty eradication and the empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups, such as women and minorities in the Global South (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006; International Telecommunication Union, 2005; Huyer and Mitter, 2003; UNCTAD, 2002; Hafkin and Taggart, 2001; Bhatnagar and Schware, 2000; Heeks, 1999). Business sectors have also enhanced with “software” and “hardware” divisions including businesses such as virtual auction houses, virtual trading for traditional goods, and product-specific or sector-specific portal sites focussing on key niche markets (Martin and Wright, 2005). One key expectation is that internet based business can provide new opportunities for underprivileged or underrepresented.

The advent of information and communication technologies in India has brought rapid changes in social structures and networks of Indian society. Sociologists, economists and technologists have debated on the critical issue of systemic transformations due to the induction of the new tools of ICTs. In a burst of “technology as solution” enthusiasm not seen since the green revolution, ICTs are expected to solve a variety of problems, ranging from assuring India's place in the sun to establishing good governance and alleviating poverty. A huge amount of money is spent to the uplift of poorest of developing nations with the hope that ICT can enable them to leapfrog traditional problems of development like poverty, illiteracy, disease, hunger, unemployment, corruption, and social inequalities in order to survive in the information age. Keniston (2006) outlined the major utilization agenda of India's ICT sector. Firstly, to enhance the international economic position by building on the success of its software industry and secondly,

to develop program of IT for the masses that would play a critical role in solving the obscure problems of development that beset large sections of Indian population. Several projects have been implemented basically to enhance the reception of these ICT tools. These projects serve the purpose of informational services, transactional services and e-governance services. As 'knowledge' and 'information' dissemination are the pillars of the information age, India along with other countries has developed its communication infrastructure. India's telecom is the second largest in the world after China (Government of India, 2014). The shows that the accrued mobility of communication towards an inevitable phenomenon as more people are subscribing telecommunication. This echoes the expansion of socially rooted networks constructed due to the explosive diffusion of ICTs. When the landline telephones were found to decline, there was continuous growth in wireless telephone usage. The number of landline telephones, which was 30.21 million in the beginning of the year 2013-2014 declined to 28.50 million at the end of March 2014. On the other hand the number of wireless telephones increased from 867.81 million to 904.52 million during this period. As a result, the share of wireless telephones increased from 96.64 percent as on April 2013 to 96.95 percent as on March 2014 (Government of India, 2014).

Presently, India has the third-largest internet user base in the world. While China leads with more than 600 million internet users, the US has an estimated 279 million users. It is estimated that by December 2014, India will overtake the US as the second largest Internet users' base in the world. The user base in India is further estimated to grow to 354 million by June 2015. Internet started as a communication system for educated elites, but it has already gone beyond this selective universe, and included a broad spectrum of people and activities around the world (Castells, 1999). It has become a systemic requirement fostering social and political mobilization. Despite rapid diffusion of internet, a disproportionate number of users are concentrated in more developed countries, especially the United States (Chen and Wellman, 2004). The content of internet reflects the preferences and values of the majority of its users, making it socially biased. Hence, internet access is uneven, between countries, social class, gender, and ethnic groups. Even if differences in terms of physical access have diminished, significant differences may remain in

terms of differential skills and the nature of Internet use (DiMaggio et al., 2004; Selwyn, 2004; Chen and Wellman, 2005; Van Dijk, 2005; Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008; Zillien and Hargittai, 2009; Brandtzege et.al, 2011; Deuresen and Dijk, 2013).

1.2. Digital Divide

The digital divide depicts the division or the gap between individuals, societies and nations who have the resources to participate in the information era and those who do not. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has defined digital divide as the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities. It reflects various differences among and within countries. Communication infrastructure, computer availability and internet access are vital variables that can define digital divide. The digital divide among households depends on two variables which are income and education. Other variables, such as household size and type, age, gender, racial and linguistic backgrounds and location also play an important role. According to Hanimann and Ruedin (2007) the term ‘digital divide’ essentially describes three distinctive divides: a geographical digital divide (between regions and countries), a social digital divide (between social classes), and an upgraded digital divide (between technology and humans). Norris (2001) in his study suggests that there are at least three major divides:

- A global divide between the developed and undeveloped worlds
- A social divide between the information rich and the information poor
- A democratic divide between those who do and those who do not use the new technologies to further political participation

The discourses on ‘digital divide’ became headline news during late 1990s (Keniston and Kumar, 2003). Alongside the powerful and optimistic notions on the information age, new studies emerged with findings showing that most countries of the world, remained completely untouched by this revolution (Hoffman and Novak, 2000; Cullen, 2001; Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001; Wilson et.al, 2003; Chen and Wellman, 2004; Ali and Bailur, 2007; Hafkin and Huyer, 2008; Jackson et.al, 2008;

Deursen and Dijk, 2014). Surveys revealed massive differences between access to ICTs in economically developed countries and differences between the rich and the poor, whites and non-whites, educated and the non-educated. Discrepancies in ICT access between the so called 'North' (industrialized and wealthy nations like the U.S., West Europe, and Japan) and the "South" (virtually all developing nations) are massive, overwhelming and apparently increasing. Apart from these differences, specific group of peoples could be identified who are especially disadvantaged in their uptake of ICTs. These include: people on low incomes, people with few educational qualifications or with low literacy levels, the unemployed, elderly people, people in isolated or rural areas, people with disabilities, elderly people, women and girls. Cultural differences and inequalities in terms of education, income and health status are often the reasons identified by various studies. In an article by Cullen (2002), it was explained that in the United States, Afro-Americans, Latinos, as well as North American Indian nations are identified as needing targeted programmes to increase their participation in the digital economy. In New Zealand, the indigenous Maori people have very specific cultural and educational needs that are the focus of government programmes aimed at closing the digital divide, but the large immigrant communities from the Pacific Island states also form a group of people largely excluded from the benefits of the digital revolution that the rest of the country is enjoying.

There are large disparities of access between the affluent nations and the poor countries at the periphery which lack the skills, resources, and infrastructure to enter the information era (Chen and Wellman, 2004). Although the digital revolution is expected to erase the structural barriers due to geographic isolation, inequalities in the use of information technologies are expected to persist. Hence, there is less adoption of ICTs in the rural region when compared to the accessibility of ICTs in the urban areas.

Berg and Lie (1995) has identified technology as a defining feature of masculinity, producing and perpetuating occupational segregation by sex in the workplace. In this sense, technology represented another disguise for patriarchy and could be reduced to social power relations. During the 1990s, researchers were quick to observe that women tend to be latecomers to the digital age (Dholakia,

1994). As a consequence, the new technology was popularly portrayed as a male domain (Badagliacco, 1990). Bimber (2000) concluded that the gap in ICT usage between women and men is the “product of both socio-economic differences and some combination of underlying, gender-specific effects”. In a report by United Nations (2005) titled ‘Women 2000 and Beyond’ it was pointed out that ICTs can be powerful catalysts for political and social empowerment of women and gender equality. But the persisting gender relations which continue to affect women in the rural and urban areas are rooted in the economic, social and cultural factors. These obstacles limit women to benefit from the ICT revolution and thus creates gendered digital divide (Kiondo, 2007; Huyer and Mitter, 2002; Hafkin and Tagart, 2001; Huyer and Sikoska, 2003).

The reports from ITU (2014) demonstrated the gender gap existing at the global level during the year 2013. The Figure 1.2 provides a brief outlook on the findings from the report.

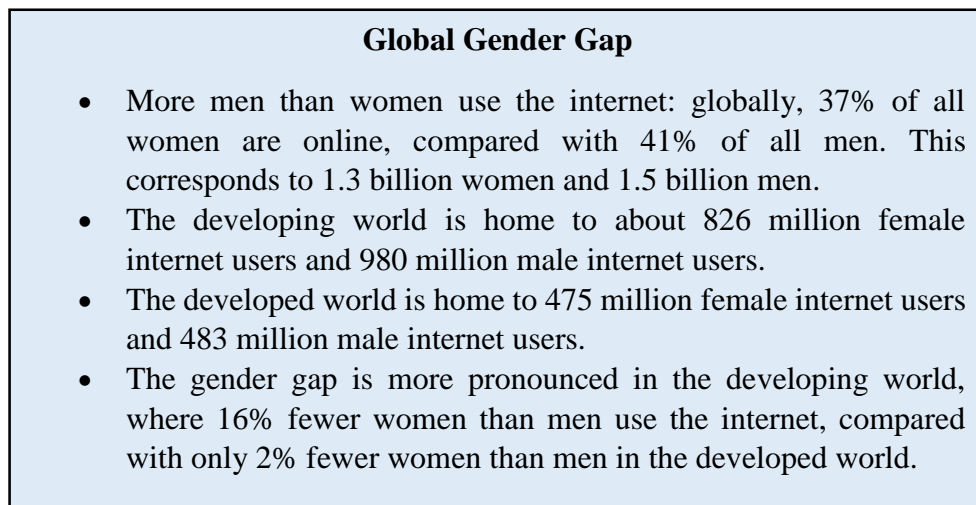


Figure 1.2. Major findings on Global Gender Gap from ITU (2014)

The above data indicates the critical social and cultural barriers, lack of resources and infrastructure that hinders women from accessing ICTs in developing nations. Gurumuthy and Chami (2014) have stated examples in their study illustrating the gender gap sustaining in India. India was placed in the category of World’s Least Connected Countries based on a composite measure of ICT access, ICT use and ICT skills by the International Telecommunications Union during the year 2013. The a study by (Antonio and Tuffley, 2014) it was found that while 8.4%

of Indian women and 11.6% of Indian men are online, there is a weighted gender gap of 27% which echoes that a woman in India is 27% less likely to have internet access than a man. These technological discrimination adds to the traditional sources of discrimination by gender, race, level of development, and rural/urban bias (Castells, 1999). The flexibility and the global reach of new system can also enhance the social-economic conditions of people who make its proper utilization.

An extract from the resolution number (66/184) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on February 06, 2012 reads as follows:

“The General Assembly....

Acknowledging the positive trends in global connectivity and affordability in the field of information and communications technologies, in particular the steady increase in Internet access to one third of the world’s population, the rapid diffusion of mobile telephony, the increased availability of multilingual content and Internet addresses and the advent of new services and applications, including m-health, mobile transactions, e-government, e-education, e-business and developmental services, which offer great potential for the development of the information society,

Emphasizing, however, that in spite of recent progress, there remains an important digital divide, recognizing in this regard that currently only 26 per cent of the population in developing countries uses the Internet, compared with 74 per cent in developed countries, and stressing the need to reduce the digital divide, including with regard to such issues as international interconnection charges for Internet use,

Recognizes that information and communications technologies have the potential to provide new solutions to development challenges, particularly in the context of globalization, and can foster sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development, competitiveness, access to information and knowledge, poverty eradication and social inclusion that will help to expedite the integration of all countries, especially developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, into the global economy;

Expresses concern regarding the digital divide in access to information and communications technologies and broadband connectivity between countries at different levels of development, which affects many economically and socially

relevant applications in such areas as government, business, health and education, and further expresses concern with regard to the special challenges faced in the area of broadband connectivity by developing countries, including the least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries;

Acknowledges that a gender divide exists as part of the digital divide, and encourages all stakeholders to ensure the full participation of women in the information society and women's access to and use of information and communications technologies for their overall empowerment and benefit;”

The above resolution adopted by United Nations in 2012 reflects the continuing global enthusiasm in this regard. Such assumptions on the potential of ICT also led to an increasing belief in the need for making these technologies essential for the development of a region (Gopakumar, 2014). The Declaration of Agreement in Support of Girls and Women in information and communication technology, introduced at the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, Tunisia on November 16, 2005, stresses that “ICT allows women increased participation in political, social, and economic arenas and supports empowerment for themselves, their families, and their communities.” In recent years, therefore, development agencies, such as the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) have substantially increased funding for ICT projects that specifically aim to empower women, such as e-commerce, e-government, business development and networking projects. Women have increasingly proven to be active and enthusiastic participants in a large variety of ICT enabled projects, such as computer training and data entry facilities, call centres, billing, computer repair work, and e-enabled businesses (Hafkin and Huyer, 2006). Many e-commerce projects have become famous in the global market due to their ability to exploit and use the potentials and skills of women at least in the initial stage. The Georgetown-initiated cottage industry, Tortas Peru, the India Shop, Women Entrepreneurs and Handicrafts producers in Bhutan are examples of (at least, initially) successful e-commerce projects. Projects like those by the Delhi based Datamation Foundation, the Information village project in Pondicherry, India and the Grameen Phone Project in Bangladesh serve as models of the potential of the ICT based projects (Maier and Reichert, 2008). Arising from this growing use

of ICTs in developing countries have come a series of studies and findings. Some have been largely optimistic and gender-neutral, seeing the contribution that ICTs can make, for example, to economic development generally or to poverty alleviation specifically (Cecchini, 2003; Kenny, 2002). The United Nations on 21st January 2015 announced in its 69th session, the Connect 2020 agenda for Global Telecommunication Development. They also stressed on doubling digital opportunities for women by enhancing their inclusion in the information society. But this phenomenon of digital divide was recognized as a global crisis during the United Nations sponsored World Summit on the information society held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis during the year 2005 (Ibid). This acted as a turning point for the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based artefacts and for overcoming the digital divide (WSIS, 2003a). In case of India, the enthusiasm for ICT was both a product and fuel for the economic liberalisation programme. Now, the core for these aspirations were the huge profits made by the Indian software and the IT services sector (Walsham, 2010). This success illustrated the possibilities of a technology that can fundamentally address two major problems in its economy- lack of industrial and export growth and unemployment. These reforms of 1991 criticised bureaucracy as an organizing form of Government and adopted practices to digitize government services.

1.3. Motivation and Scope of research

India gives significant priority to ICTs both on the production side (as seen, for instance, in the development of its software industry) and on the consumption side (with significant investments in e-government applications, and attempts to push ICTs out into rural areas) (Heeks, 1996; Bhatnagar and Schwarc, 2000). Application of ICTs has taken place through a variety of different models; for example, from pure market to pure state, and from gender-blind to gender-focused (Singall and Rogers, 2001). Spurred on by this, many governments in the individual Indian states have initiated micro reforms to attract more investment in the ICT sector to their respective regions.

The state of Kerala in southern India forged a somewhat singular development path that, however, was circumscribed by the national fervour of

planned development. Kerala achieved significant success in reducing poverty and social inequalities through concerted popular mobilizations and public actions (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). According to Kannan (2005), Kerala's development experience cannot just be considered as a unique trajectory of development commonly classified as high social development with low per capita income, but is the best example of state that has "demonstrated that poverty alleviation can be achieved along with a reduction in spatial and gender gaps, the two important gaps that are prominent in the development experience". It is also important to note that Kerala's success in enhancing basic human capabilities, and thereby reducing poverty through educational attainments, improved health services, meaningful land reforms, and so on, has a long historical foundation dating back to the nineteenth century.

Kerala's development experience began to receive attention. The development experience of Kerala began to receive attention with the publication of a United Nations study on poverty, unemployment and development policy in Kerala as a response to some macro-level disaggregate studies on poverty in India which showed very low level of per capita income and high level of poverty in Kerala ostensibly ignoring some seemingly contradictory developments on the social front (CDS, 1975). One of the early attempts to situate the development experience of the state and interpret its evolution in a comparative framework was initiated by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (1989). Within the larger context of understanding the role of public action in alleviating poverty and preventing famines in the Third World, they offered a close look at the development experiences of certain regions that have made commendable strides in containing the problem of hunger or preventing its more catastrophic avatar of famines (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003).

It was the democratic decentralisation process initiated in the late 1990s as part of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. This resulted in the formation of the three tier system with the transferring of substantial power into the hands of the grass roots. People's plan Campaign was launched in August 1996 with multi-pronged socio-political mobilization and sensitization of people with effective participation of organizations like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) which

was associated with institution-building at different tiers and levels (Key Informant, 2014). The campaign needed women's participation to make decentralization process democratic and effective (Isaac and Franke, 2002). Shortly afterwards Kudumbashree was launched in the year 1998 to address the issues of poverty and women empowerment. This community based network worked in tandem with the LSGIs for ensuring poverty eradication with the formation of SHGs and NHGs. There was a symbiotic relation between the various government departments to enhance women's participation at the grass roots level (Key Informant, 2014).

Meanwhile, huge reformation was happening in the field of ICT intervention, especially addressing e-governance services of the Government. Kerala stands ahead in most of the development indices and also has a lot of schemes for common people for their enhancement in the IT field. The Kerala Government has many programmes in this section like INSIGHT, *Akshaya* and FRIENDS. But the researcher was keen in understanding whether any methods were adopted by the Government to integrate women into the growing ICT sector, who has better representation in the sex ratio (Census, 2011) but fall behind in the overall workforce participation rate in Kerala (Abraham, 2013). While the empirical and theoretical research in these areas has been growing over the past years, but there are a few literature focussed on the fundamental aspects of these ICT programmes handled by the Government of Kerala.

My research interest as well as the basis of the study stems from the above discussions. This thesis is primarily motivated by the need to identify and bridge the gaps in the area of women handled ICT enterprises. Only a few of the researchers have tried to capture the implications of such a programme. It was however important to understand the fundamental structure of such organisations and the one key factor to be analysed was the complex relationships existing between the ICT, process, agents, institutions etc.

The study was based on Kudumbashree IT Enterprises which were the only existing ICT programme initiated especially for women. As they were the part of Kudumbashree, the ideologies followed by them seemed empowerment driven. It was the only programme existing in Kerala that utilized the abilities of women for

the purpose of digitizing raw government data. The upcoming chapters have fully described the translations and social transactions occurring through the social networks. In this study, the researcher has tried to analyse the causes for the emergence of such ICT programmes. The study address the factors that empower the women beneficiaries of the Government ICT programmes and also tries to probe into the constraining and liberating facets of the women entrepreneurs who participate in the ICT programme initiated by the Government of Kerala.

1.4. Research Objective

The primary research question that this study wants to address is the following:

Do Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala hold the strategic approach to enhance women's capabilities?

Related sub-questions include:

- (a) What led to the genesis of the Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?
- (b) What are the controlling and liberating factors affecting women due to the adoption of Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?
- (c) How does Government ICT programme for women construct empowerment in its social, economic and political domains?

An understanding on these factors won't be complete unless the concepts are refined using a rigorous literature review. The literature dealt with a wide array of studies demonstrating the impacts of various Government led programmes on the empowerment of women beneficiaries. Genesis of the ICT programme for women was done using the theoretical and methodological apparatus of ANT.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. A summary of the contents of each chapter is given below:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research work undertaken in the context of Kerala. It also gives the reader an understanding on the scope as well as the motivation of the study. The background of the study has been discussed in the

initial sections of the chapter whereas the subsequent sections deals with the research questions and objectives of the study. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 illustrates the wide range of literature based on the topics raised by the research questions and objectives of the study. The study has focussed on the ICT programmes initiated by the Government of Kerala especially for women. Hence, the chapter was crafted with a view to draw upon the literature on ICT, Women Empowerment and SHGs.

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework employed in the study and describes the methodology followed. The study draws from the themes identified from the previous chapters and has developed the operational definition of the concepts used in the context of the research. Sociology of translation was utilized to analyse the factors associated with the formation of an Information system using a network of women. The methodology was also backed up by certain PRA tools that succoured the researcher in gaining in depth knowledge regarding the field.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the genesis of an ICT programme initiated by the Government of Kerala meant for uplifting women. Sociology of translation was used to get a concrete understanding of the various events which took place as part of the process. This chapter has carefully explained the latent ideologies and methodologies used by the parent organization while constructing a “gender sensitive” ICT programme.

Chapter 5 describes the constraining and liberating factors faced by women mainly due to their participation in such a programme. It explains the intricate social transactions and the discourses happening in the field. This chapter also showcased some interesting findings which helps in understanding the social world of the women beneficiaries. It elucidates the different issues faced by the actors and illuminates on the process of adaptation undertaken by them.

Chapter 6 explains the three major facets of empowerment – social, economic and political. It describe degree of attainment of empowerment by the women beneficiaries. Indicators were defined for each of them which has been

explained in Chapter 3. Data was analysed using mixed method as the researcher had to use both quantitative and qualitative information.

The study ends with Chapter 7 where the researcher has provided all the necessary discussions and conclusions. It also contains a summary of its contents, reflecting upon the journey and addressing the research questions which guided the journey. The chapter also discusses broader implication of the ICT programme and includes certain suggestions as part of policy contribution. The chapter also provides the theoretical contributions of this research and examines the limitations of the study along with the scope for future research in this area.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

The chapter begins with an attempt to unpack the concept of empowerment and to understand the background upon which this study has to be undertaken. The review also highlights the intricate linkages between women, ICT and empowerment. The researcher has explored the diversity of the issues, historical circumstances and institutional forces that directed the construction of empowerment in case of women.

The literature on empowerment unveils the cause of the various attempts which paved way for focussing entirely on the empowerment of women. It has also explicitly explained the linkages between a state poverty alleviation programme - *Kudumbashree* and the way it leads to women empowerment. The literature which serves to elucidate the various cases on the impact of ICT on women empowerment provides a larger canvas to understand the implications of gender focused ICT programmes for women.

This chapter concludes with the conceived conceptual framework which paves to guide this research. It has also discussed the seeds of the research problem through intensive investigation of present secondary data available as literature.

2.2. Defining Empowerment

The term empowerment has different meanings in different sociocultural and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always leads to lively discussion. These terms include self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability to mention only a few (WDR, 2001). These definitions

are embedded in local value and belief systems. There are a variety of bewildering ways to define and explain the notion of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). It is the idea of “power” central to the concept of empowerment. Hence, this is the starting point which discusses how the notion of empowerment was understood for this study. The concept of power is mostly linked to the subject of social stratification. The best known definition of power is that of Max Weber in *Economy and Society* (1920) as “the chance of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action”. This is a very capacious conception as it includes phenomenon of coercion, domination and manipulation (Beteille, 1999). Inequalities in the distribution of power leads to the outcome of “class” and “status” which are the two principle dimensions of it (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Browne (1995) considered power as a creative energy, force and potential whereas Giddens (1985) identified it as a “transformational capacity”.

The basic concept of empowerment was explained in the context of Indian society by Beteille (1999) in his explanations which pointed out the most deep rooted forms of inequality existing in the structure of traditional Indian society based on caste and gender. He also commented on the deep-rooted ideas of purity and pollution which governed the social standings of different castes and sexes where men and women were deemed to be of unequal moral worth. He elucidated that the notion of empowerment designates radical social transformation of ordinary, common people rather than politicians, experts and other socially or culturally advantaged persons. Above all, he stated that it is about power, although the concept of power contained in it is generally left unspecified. Through this article the root of empowerment was captured which symbolized both as a means to an end and an end in itself. It is the ability of the term to adapt itself differently in various situations, and its signification is both variable and fluid. It shows that the value of the concept lies precisely in its “fuzziness” (Kabeer, 1999). Hence, this lack of clarity about the notion of empowerment reflects the fact that its root concept of power is itself one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences (Rowlands, 1997).

Lukes (1974) in his work focussed on the notion of hidden power by arguing that power is not only about how people make decisions or who or what gets left out, but is also about how power is able to operate without being perceived at all; B acts in the favour of A without realizing it is contrary to his/her interests. He also argues that it is the “false consciousness” acquired when B was directly instilled with A’s ideas or when B was indirectly influenced by the way society was structured.

The word “empower” in relation to power can be interpreted as the ability or the capacity of individuals or groups to achieve their own needs. Power is exercised through social interactions among individuals and groups. Suguna et al. (2007) cited that “Becoming powerful” is the literal meaning of the term ‘empowerment’.

As part of the study, it was necessary to understand how power is perceived in terms four levels which are differentiated as zero-sum and non-zero-sum models of power. Zero-sum means one group’s increase in power necessarily involves another’s loss of power (Oxaal et. al., 1997).

- Zero- Sum model of power
 - a) Power over - Power was first typified as power over (Mosedale, 2003). It refers to the ability of an individual or group to get his/her/their way over other individuals or group in a given situation. This power involves a mutually exclusive relationship of domination or subordination. It assumes that power exists only in limited quantity. It triggers either passive or active resistance.
- Non - Zero - sum model of power – In this case, one person’s gain in power should not necessarily signify the loss of another’s power and it includes the following forms of power.
 - a) Power to - This power includes the ability to make decision, have authority and find solutions to problems which can be creative and enabling. It is also about the ability to generate power in other people.

b) Power with - This power comes from being with other people who share a common understanding or goal. It represents the strength that results from collective action and which is greater than the sum of individuals. It showcases solidarity and collaboration. It not only helps those who are disempowered but also those who already hold power.

c) Power within - This power refers to one's sense of spiritual strength, self - esteem and assertiveness. Through this power individuals can analyse their experiences and gain the confidence to influence and change situations.

It can be said that the concept of empowerment found its origin in the fight against poverty (Barry and Sidaway, 1999). An empowered community is designated with the ability of initiating self-improvement efforts, responds to threats to quality of life, and provides opportunities for citizen participation, according to Zimmerman (2000). Empowerment can also be defined as the ability of people to control their own destinies in relation to other people in society (Mason, 2005). According to the World Bank (2008), empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

In an extensive exploration of the term empowerment, Kabeer (1999, 2001) focuses on three dimensions that define the capacity to exercise strategic life choices: access to resources, agency, and outcomes. Kabeer characterizes resources as the means through which agency is carried out. Resources increase the ability to exercise choice and are attained by social institutions and relationships in society. When access to resources becomes a necessary precondition for empowerment, then the ability to utilize and identify those resources explains the power to define and act upon one's own goal. Kabeer depicts achievements as the extent to which one's capabilities which includes both resources and agency are realized.

Sen (1985, 1999) has also written extensively on the importance of substantive freedoms and the individual freedom to choose and achieve different outcomes (WDR, 2001). Rao (2002) in a conceptual analysis of empowerment

notes that empowerment is not merely restricted to sharing and distribution of power but it also involves changes in the social, economic, institutional arrangements, political ideologies and traditional practice. According to Castelein et.al. (2008), empowerment originates from political arena even though a consensus has not yet been reached on its definition.

From certain phenomenological research on empowerment amongst activists (Drury and Reicher, 1999, 2005), the concept of empowerment was linked to collective action. These studies illustrated that enlightening experience of a participant to take a decision of participating in a collective action to acquire desired goal shows a new self-changing understanding that the world is tractable, and that therefore they can change their position of subordination, is exciting and exhilarating. Empowerment here refers to participant's understanding of their ability to transform social relations (Drury et.al, 2015).

Indeed, the complexity of the term which makes it prone to a variety of interpretations has been explained in the study by Morrell and Wilkinson (2002). It also implies that it is not perceived and understood in the same way by different organizations nor will people within the same organization think of it in a similar way. Hales (2000) shows widespread divergence between the rhetoric of empowerment and the limited reality of empowerment programmes.

It was also understood through the review that the references term empowerment dates back to the 1960s especially in the Afro-American Movement and in Paulo Freire's theory that put forward the notion of 'conscientization' as a process by which the poor could challenge the structure of power and control over their lives Charlier et.al (2007). It was also considered that the concept of women's empowerment emerged from debates generated by the women's movement during the 1980s when feminists, particularly from Third World countries, evinced dissatisfaction with the prevailing development discourse that was largely apolitical and economic in its orientation. Thus, it was in the 1980s which saw the emergence and spread of "women's empowerment" as a more political and transformatory concept challenging not only the patriarchy but also the mediating structures of class, race, and ethnicity and in the case of India, it was the notion of caste and

religion which got questioned. Feminists, particularly from Latin American and South Asian countries emphasized the importance of consciousness raising which led to the organization and building up of a movement for women's equality. By the beginning of 1990s, the term 'empowerment' had entered the development discourse and was widely used with reference to women and gender equality. Development agencies (multilateral and bilateral) started using the term to replace the earlier terminology of 'people's participation' and 'women's development'. The World Conference held at Beijing during the year 1995 played a critical role in introducing the term to national governments for whom it soon became an attractive catch phrase (Dighe, 2006).

Various other secondary sources were referred to perceive the construct of empowerment. The notion due to its popularity has also been used and applied to research upon the issues of powerlessness dealt by the minority groups which includes blacks, women and other backward communities. Hence, some of the studies have stressed on the significance of participation of marginalised group in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policy decisions which proves that both uncritical and safe distance participation would not benefit such groups.

Empowerment can be expressed in four aspects as described in a study by Mosedale (2003). According to her, one must be disempowered to become empowered. Secondly, empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party. Thirdly, empowerment represents a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and are able to carry them out. Finally, empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. It was a clear explanation of the fact that the phenomenon of empowerment demonstrates the enhanced decision making capacity of the oppressed and subordinated people regarding matters which affect their lives. Decentralised planning, mobilisation of resources and empowerment of marginalised community are related to rural development (Satya, 2001). She illustrated that participatory rural development emphasising the quantitative and qualitative participation of people in Government's development programmes at different stages of its implementation. It was found in the study that such inclusion of local people would eventually result in minimizing leakages, better implementation of programmes, mobilisation of local resources and empowerment

of poor and marginalised. A study conducted in Andhra Pradesh illustrated the importance of knowledge and awareness rather than mere literacy in forming the base for empowerment. She suggests that it is the organisation of people into group that would amass strength and access information (Sarala, 1997).

In the simplest form, empowerment means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance indicating women marginalized from the mainstream society due to patriarchy. Dighe (2006) defines empowerment as a process of transforming the relations of power between individuals and social groups, shifting social power in three critical ways: by challenging the ideologies that justify inequality (such as gender or caste), by changing prevailing patterns of access to control over economic, natural and intellectual resources and by transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures (such as the family, state market, education and media. Another definition put forwarded by Mason (2005), refers the relational nature of empowerment. According to her, empowerment is about the extent to which some categories of people are able to control their own destinies, even when the people with whom they interact oppose their interests. She also mentioned that people are not empowered or disempowered in a vacuum rather they are empowered or disempowered relative to other people of groups whose lives intersect with theirs and whose interests differ from theirs.

It should be also noted that though overall empowerment of a person enhances with employment (Rosa, 2004). She further states that income is not the only prime factor determining the empowerment of a person. Veena (2003) in her analysis on the perspectives of empowerment has laid down the processes involved for empowerment at individual and community levels. She states that individual empowerment requires community involvement, developing skills, taking decisions and solving problems independently. It was very interesting to understand that when 'blacks' hold positions of political power they are more active and participate at higher rates than 'whites' of comparable socio-economic status. This conclusion is based on the finding that empowerment leads to higher levels of political knowledge and that it leads to a more engaged (i.e. trusting and valuable) orientation to politics (Lawrence and Franklin, 1990). In the context of healthcare,

empowerment shows the process of helping people to assert control over the factors which affect their lives. This process encompasses both the individual responsibility in health care and the broader institutional, organizational or societal responsibilities in enabling people to assume responsibility for their own health (Gibson, 1991).

2.3. Women Empowerment

When it comes to women empowerment, it was in the year 1980 when the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women held at Copenhagen defined development including women's development which should not be viewed as an issue but as an essential component in every dimension of development (Sahay, 1998).

Twin strategy was adopted by the World Bank in year 2001 to eradicate poverty - large scale investment in developing countries; and empowerment of underprivileged people. Women have become the targets of extreme forms of discrimination that persists in many parts of the world (Obayelu and Ogunlade, 2006). Therefore, women are not only the representatives of impoverished people but they also form the most deprived and cross cut category of individuals that overlaps with all other disadvantaged groups like minorities and poor etc. Laizu et.al (2010) argued that women have limited access to resources and economy even if they actively participate in taking care of children, family members, livestock and agricultural work, household work, health care and so forth.

The UNICEF Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework emphasizes women's access, awareness of causes of inequality, capacity to direct one's own interests, and taking control over the actions to overcome obstacles to reducing structural inequality (UNICEF, 2001).

The United Nations Development Programme's Gender Empowerment Measure focuses on inequalities in economic and political participation and decision-making power and power over economic resources (UNDP 1995).

Within the national agenda, women empowerment became a necessity for policy measures especially in the form of five year plans. It was through the study

done by Bapuji and Rao (2005) where the various women welfare schemes incorporated in different five year plans in India along with the different rural development schemes launched for the welfare of women. They showed that welfare of women has always remained one of India's primary goals right from the independence while empowerment came to the fore front in the nation's political agenda only during the 1980s. They opined that the women organizations and their leaders have a vital role to play in empowering women and in creating awareness among women themselves by upbringing a change in their value orientation. They concluded by stating that the Indian society can claim itself as a civilized society and its democracy as a perfect democracy only when gender equality is achieved in all the spheres of society.

Another study by Singh and Ansari (2008) also discussed the aspects related to women empowerment programmes and policies in different five year plans. They stated that the first plan was welfare oriented; the second focused on grass root level development, the third and fourth accorded high priority to education and health, from the fifth plan there was a shift from welfare to development, in the sixth plan thrust on health, education and development, the seventh plan focused on developmental programmes, the eighth plan further shifted the approach from development to empowerment, the ninth plan emphasized on reservation of one third seats for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies, in the tenth plan empowerment of women and strategies continued and the eleventh plan has to address the issues relating to feminization of poverty, difference in wage rates and exploitation of women. Some studies (Burra et.al, 2005) reveal that the greatest burden of poverty and related problems fall on women. The present study has also explained the details of five year plans along with the five-fold strategy followed to ensure economic empowerment with special focus on women in agriculture; social empowerment and engendering social change; political empowerment by facilitating entry and effective functioning of women in Parliament, PRIs and in premier government services; strengthening mechanism for effective implementation of women related legislations; creating institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming and strengthening delivery mechanisms for effective implementation of women related programmes.

Other writers explore empowerment at different levels: personal, involving a sense of self-confidence and capacity; relational, implying ability to negotiate and influence relationship and decisions; and collective (Rowlands, 1997).

Batliwala (1994) in his paper suggested three major approaches or strategies for women empowerment which are:

- Integrated development approach - This approach ascribes women's powerlessness to their greater poverty, ill health etc. and therefore aims to help meet women's basic survival needs.
- Economic development approach - It focuses on building around women's strengths as waged workers and promoting the view that further empowerment will be a spinoff of economic empowerment.
- Consciousness raising and organizing approach - This approach is based on a more complex understanding of gender relations and women's status.

Similarly, it was Bhowmik (2006) who identified another three approaches for women empowerment which are:

- Integrated approach – It states that women's powerlessness is a by – product of her environment where she belongs. They lack the confidence to work for their betterment. They demand the restoration of confidence to provide a sense of security to her.
- Women's mobilization approach - Mobilization in general, is a process which is induced at the attitudinal and behavioural levels in social groups within a society. It is a very open minded approach and places no boundaries on women's empowerment. It has a holistic approach.
- Gender sensitive participatory approach – This approach states that to empower women one needs to address the multiple social relations and institutions which oppress women along with constructing a gender perspective. They consider it as a necessary factor to create spaces for women by identifying and addressing their strategic gender interests rather than just practical needs.

Another study by Suman et al. (2005) showcases two approaches for women empowerment which are:

- Sponsored approach – It represents the efforts made by the state to improve women's power position by making some statutory provisions and legal enactments. It is an approach 'from above'.
- Self-striven approach – It showcases the case of empowerment through self-mobilization. It implies the mobilization 'from below'.

It becomes clear from the discussions that most researchers have focussed only on the ways to improve the effectiveness of the local people at the grass root level and they have underplayed to capture the impact of global and national forces on the prospects of empowerment. Hence, it was in a study by Rai et al. (2002) where they have proposed a new approach to women's empowerment that focuses on four issues. First, empowerment must be analysed in global and national as well as local terms. Second, understanding and facilitating women's empowerment requires a more nuanced analysis of power. Drawing on Foucault's writings, they argued that empowerment involves the exercise rather than possession of power. According to them, empowerment must be understood as including both individual consciousness (power within) as well as the ability to work collectively which can lead to politicized power with others, which provides the power to bring about change. Third, since empowerment takes place within institutional contexts, it is important to pay attention to the broad political and economic structures and cultural assumptions. Finally, empowerment is both a process and an outcome. While as a process, it is difficult to measure empowerment since it is fluid and often unpredictable, it can also be seen as an outcome that can be measured against expected goals.

It must also be stated that some studies (Venugopal, 2005) have pointed out that as women were lagged behind in the fields of education, development and employment, hence, their work became highly undervalued in economic terms. Therefore, women need to be empowered economically, socially and politically. Concrete efforts are needed to empower women to get involved in all aspects of development. In his work, he mentioned certain components of empowerment

which later became useful for the study, in terms of defining indicators for empowerment. Figure 2.1 shows the components of awareness building; Figure 2.2 deals with the organizing skills; Figure 2.3 demonstrates the components associated with capacity building and skill development; Figure 2.4 shows the participative skills and the Figure 2.5 represents the components of access and control.

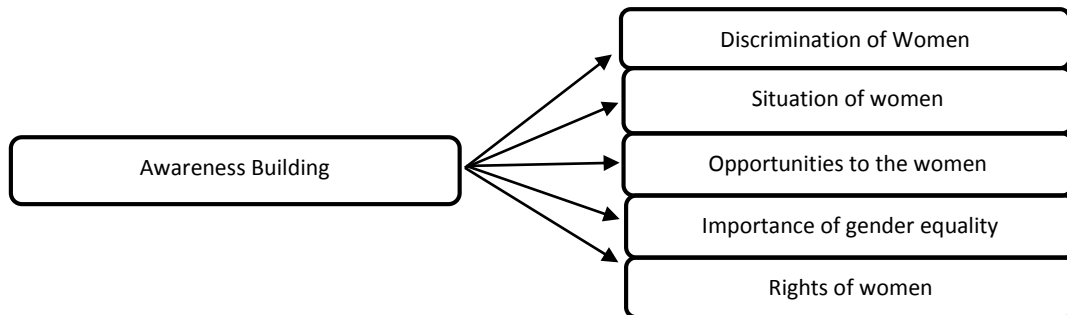


Figure 2.1. Components of awareness building

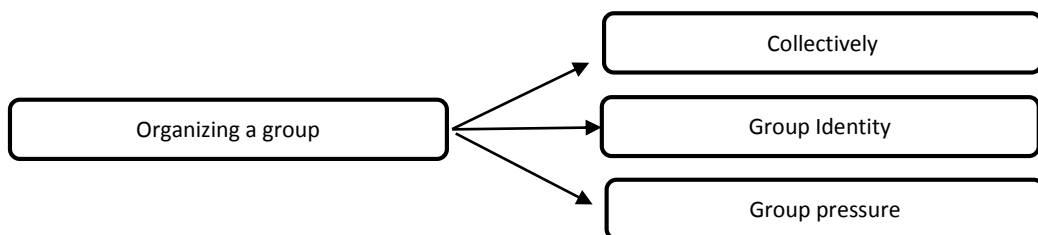


Figure 2.2. Components of organizing skills

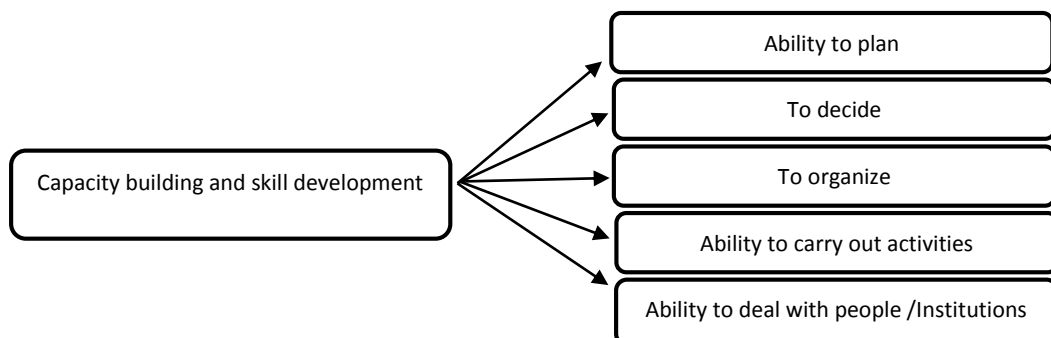


Figure 2.3. Components of capacity building and skill development

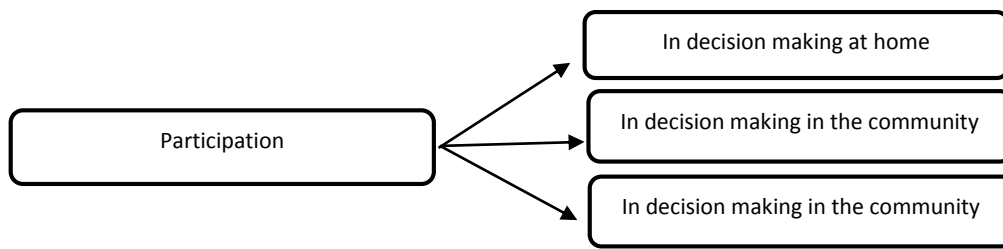


Figure 2.4. Components of participative skills

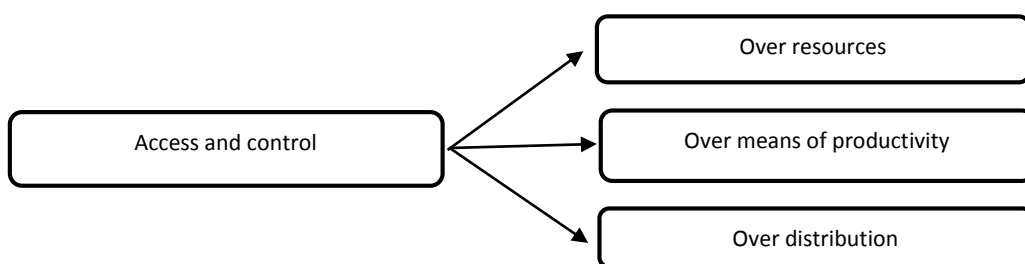


Figure 2.5 Components of access and control

Certain other components of empowerment were identified in a study by Suguna et.al (2007).

- Women's and Men's sense of internal strength and confidence to face life.
- The right to make choices
- The power to control their own lives within and outside the home
- The ability to influence the direction of social change towards the creation of a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally.

Another study by Bhowmik (2006) also put forward some other components of such as:

- Equal participation in decision-making process, control over resources and mechanism for sustaining these gains
- Knowledge and awareness
- Participation
- Self - image
- Autonomy

Empowerment can also represent a socio-political concept which includes some components like cognitive, psychological, economic and political components. Cognitive component refers to women's understanding of the causes of their subordination. It involves 'understanding the self and the need to make choices that go against cultural or social expectations'. Psychological component showcases women's believing that they can act at personal and social levels to improve their condition. It also involves an escape from "learned helplessness" and the development of self-esteem and confidence. The component related to economic dimension elucidates not only financial independence but also the independence in general. The political component includes the ability to imagine one's situation and mobilize for social change. Collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social transformation (Stromquist, 1995). Different interrelated and mutually reinforcing components like collective awareness and capacity building, skill development, participation can have greater control over decision making and lead to certain actions to bring about gender equality which can work together to create empowerment of women (Karl, 1995).

Women empowerment can also represent a process of awareness and capacity building which may enable them to fully utilise their creative potential which can lead to greater participation and decision making power in order to lead a meaningful life. It was also stated in a study by Kochurani (2005) that women should move beyond the state of beneficiaries and grow into a stage of becoming critical agents of development. She argued that empowered women are like social capital for the economy. It should be the conscious effort from the government, voluntary and charitable agencies to create such social capital to move towards the goal of women empowerment. Empowerment can be related to the four major tenets (Murugaiah, 2002) which are namely collectivisation, capacity building, ownership and mediation. In his work, he suggests the need of four types of interventions to enhance empowerment - activity networking, upgradation interventions, generating better returns and initiating new activities to enhance women's income. While alleviating discrimination, Gopalan (1999) stated that it is highly essential to empower women with employment and earning capacity. She further cites that high literacy rate has not influenced the status of women.

Giri (1998) in her article titled “Emancipation and Empowerment of women” talks about the different strategies adopted to empower women and classify it into three broad categories which are integrated development approach, economic approach and consciousness rising cum organizing approach. She has also explained these approaches as in the first approach the assumption is that women’s disempowerment is due to their lack of education, low economic status, lack of access to resources and low decision-making power and the second approach is based on the assumption that economic intervention is considered necessary because of their low economic status and consequent dependence whereas the third approach presumes that empowerment can be achieved through awareness.

Highlighting the strategic role of empowerment of women in poverty alleviation, Acharya and Grimire (2005) state that the only proper way to diminish poverty is by enhancing the empowerment of women and other disadvantaged groups. They also make a special note of varied forces of exclusions - economic, social, cultural, geographic and rural, to which the poor is exposed.

Santhosh (2003), in a critical analysis of Women’s Empowerment Perspectives, remarks that women empowerment in the social, economic and political realms can be achieved only by a multi-dimensional approach. He further holds that mere passing of social legislations and making them worn out without change in the attitudes of persons responsible for implementing will not accentuate empowerment. A mere representation of women in development and equality issues is not enough, rather they must be positioned in a required status to improve the situation of their groups (Panday and Shabila, 2016). It was also pointed out by Ramesh (2002) in his article, that it is essential to utilise the potentialities and capabilities of women to the fullest extent for the full-fledged development of a country. He has also discussed the essential role of empowerment in making women self-reliant and self-confident. He further puts forth the necessity to inculcate social awareness and motivation among women and men to strengthen women empowerment efforts.

Sushama (1998) in an article on women empowerment argues that empowerment process helps women to change other women's consciousness in the following ways.

- By altering their self-image and their beliefs about their rights and capabilities.
- By creating awareness of gender discrimination
- By challenging the sense of inferiority that has been imprinted on them since birth and recognizing the true value of their labour and contribution to the family, society and economy.

She also identified three stages in the realization of women empowerment. According to her, in the first stage, women learn to analyse the provided situation and in the process, the aroused fear turns into an understanding. In the second stage, women learn to experience the change and acquire the courage to protest against the injustice whereas in the last stage they adapt to the situation by acquiring self-confidence in a more mature state of realization which creates a learning spirit amongst them. Empowerment of society and enrichment of family could be attained through empowering women. It was stated by Nigam (2001) who also disclosed certain aspects which break the traditional family structure. They are consumerism, migration, urbanization, liberalization and the like socio-economic changes, which led to apparent evils of insecurity, domestic violence and increased rates of divorce.

For the practical understanding of empowerment, the study during the literature survey identified secondary sources which dealt with the impact of SHGs and micro-credit on the empowerment of women in the social, economic and political realms of women. It aided in attaining a much meaningful grounded understanding of the concept of empowerment.

2.4. Impact of SHGs on Women empowerment

Through the study by Nagayya and Rao (2009) it was found that the concept of Self-Help Group (SHG) is one such model which produced significant success in empowering the poor and the disempowered women. The very idea of SHG was developed by Professor Muhammed Yunus of Chittagong University in

Bangladesh in 1975. In case of India, it was NABARD which initiated SHGs in 1986-87 and the process got accelerated only after 1991-92, following the linkage of SHGs with banks. The basic principles identified for these SHGs were namely, group approach, mutual trust, organization of small and manageable groups, group cohesiveness, spirit of thrift, demand based lending, collateral free and women friendly loans, peer group pressure in repayment, skill training, capacity building and empowerment. Hence, this study concluded stating that through micro finance movement, the SHGs facilitated the empowerment of women at the grass root level.

A study conducted on the SHGs in Tamil Nadu (Jyothy, 2002) found that women development depends upon capacity building, awareness and health, education, environment, legal rights, functional literacy and numeracy, communication skills, leadership skills for self and mutual help. The study concluded that organisation of self-help groups and development of their institutional and managerial capacity is an imperative element in the empowerment process of women. Women interacted with external agencies and professionals with confidence, which was an evidence of improved social skills and approachability. They were able to be particular about their needs and sought help from various schemes of development. It could also be stated that the best way to accentuate the pace of empowerment is to organise women into SHGs and involve them in micro entrepreneurial activities.

An experience from SEWA was reported in an article by Reema (2003) who advocates from her study that an effective empowerment strategy is to assign the income deprived to the workers, planners and managers besides assisting them to earn their livelihood. She has also indicated that it is due to the integrated approach of SEWA that it has become successful in attaining a state of full employment through unions and cooperatives in building collective and organisational strength. It has also refined the capability of women in providing social security and their capacity to face competitive market. Sreedharan (2006) in his work on empowerment of women micro entrepreneurs under SHGs states that the economic empowerment of women in terms of income is at low level as the incremental income is less than ₹1500, which is targeted by the Kudumbashree mission as the minimum income to be earned per month where as in a study

conducted by Sudharani et al. (2008) on SHGs and empowerment, it was found that the participation in the self-help groups enriched the women in house managements, health and leadership qualities. It was also observed by the author that the decision-making capacity of the SHG participants increased with the period of participation.

When the working of SHGs was analysed in a study by Suguna (2002) in Andhra Pradesh as a collective action for empowerment and new women's movements. It was found that the SHGs provide an enriching capability for anti-poverty programme and contribute to women empowerment by functioning in a highly democratic way. He concludes that such collective action working with the ideology of empowerment were fast emerging as women movement throughout the nation, especially in Andhra Pradesh where 50 per cent of such SHGs in the country were formed during those years. Anand (2002) evaluated selected SHGs and NHGs of Malappuram district of Kerala state, their performance, the presence of factors required for their successful functioning, the role of promoting agencies and the impact of SHGs and micro credit on women empowerment observes that both external and internal factors play an active role in making the groups self-reliant. The study concludes by stating that increased income, savings and assets economically empower the members and enhance their self-confidence.

Sunder Raj (2004) observes the conceptual framework of SHGs as a tool for empowerment and how they contribute significantly to the overall development of rural women. He reports that SHGs have the ability to empower women by training them to take active part in the socio economic progress of the nation by making them sensitized, self-made and self-disciplined for succeeding in their day-to-day life. He states that these women who were once considered 'non-productive and non-asset worthy', are now regarded as 'agents of change and economic development', due to their participation in SHGs.

Sasikala and Uma (2011) in their study examined the role of micro finance and SHG in the empowerment of women of Hunsur Taluk in Mysore district of Karnataka state. Through their study they concluded that after joining SHGs, women acquired collective strength for fighting against social evils. Their self confidence and self-esteem reflected in their decision making process ultimately

resulted in the socio-economic development of the village. This study also showcased certain important changes noticed in the women beneficiaries of the SHG.

- Increased access to resources and local group activities.
- Enhanced decision making capacity.
- Readiness to fight against social evils.
- Responsibility for socio-economic development of the village.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence.

Another study by Sahoo (2013) discussed the need for self-help groups and women empowerment. They concluded by stating that such SHGs have emerged as the most vital instrument in the process of participatory development and women empowerment. The rural women are the marginalized groups in the society because of socioeconomic constraints and so they remain backward always. Through microfinance and formation of self-help groups, they could emerge as empowered group. The role of education was reiterated Usha (2004) in making women economically, politically and socially empowered. She adds that it is education which can equip women to participate in development programmes competitively and productively. Renganathan (2004) focussed on the importance of participatory planning stating that by engaging women in such activities can pave way for their empowerment. He also suggests measures like, strengthening people's institutions, institutional arrangements to cater to their needs and field based applied research, for ensuring effective people participation.

Pattnaik and Pradhan (2005) could relate empowerment and violence in their study by illustrating an urgent need to end violence and atrocities committed against women. They also noted that strengthening women in leadership roles, involving them in decision making and increasing their access to education and control over resources will pave the way towards empowerment of women assisting in turn to minimize discrimination and violence.

Another study by Ahirrao (2009) stresses the importance of micro finance in empowerment of women and opines that empowerment is a social action process which promotes participation of people, organisation and communities in gaining

control over their lives in their community by the formation of SHG and micro financing for enhancing their socio-economic position in the society. He observes that majority of rural women who are associated with self-help group activity positively succeeded to gain them empowered.

Verma (2008) narrates empowerment of rural women through the concept of micro finance. She reveals that micro finance helped the poor women by providing independent sources of income outside the home, which reduces the dependency on the husband's income, by increasing the assertiveness of women and providing independent source of income with exposure to new sets of ideas, values and social support.

Positive facts of micro finance such as women's ability to influence decisions, increased self-confidence, and status, economic and political empowerment and finds that there exists a positive correlation between credit availability and women's empowerment was discussed by Sinha (2004). She points out that limitations such as time consuming meetings, and time consuming income generating activities without reduction of traditional responsibilities may increase women's work and time burden.

In a study by Ramesh (2006) conducted in a backward district of Mahabubnagar in Telangana Region to assess the qualitative changes in the lives of rural women by developing micro-enterprises pointed out that through the qualitative participation in SHGs and Grama Sabhas, women can emancipate their state of livelihood. Further, it will be truly meaningful if their economic empowerment is also ensured to enable the poor women to lead a decent, prosperous and respectable life. In another study done by Shidaganal (2009) on the impact of Strishakti SHG scheme on the participation of women in Panchayat institutions discovered that the scheme helped women not only in improving their socio-economic status but also enriched their awareness on individual rights and responsibilities. It also brought enormous changes in the outlook of women members and helped them in realizing their strength intrinsically. Due to the awareness of the public grievances and improvement of the communication skill by the involvement in SHGs, women were able to raise public issues like construction

of sanitary latrines, smokeless stoves, providing of public lights and drinking water facilities in Grama Sabha meetings.

Jameela (2003) in her study to examine the effectiveness of various policies and programmes implemented by the government in empowering women points out that micro-credit approach was successful not only for alleviating poverty but also for empowering women. It further enhances their self-esteem and confidence which in turn helpful in building the capacity of the poor women in managing self-employment opportunities. Malathi (2004) illustrated in her study on the importance of economic empowerment which according to her represents much more than an earning capacity. It also represents the capacity to earn one's livelihood and the resultant self-confidence can provide a strong foundation to the empowerment -initiatives of women.

Vinayagamoorthy (2007) in his study related to economic empowerment of women in the northern Tamil Nadu, states that the SHGS in the studied villages were functioning very successfully. The study revealed that the income of these women has increased after joining the SHGs and the monthly household expenditure has also increased considerably. However, the rate of growth of savings is slow because the incremental expenditure is high and the major share of the income is spent on consumption need. Since the repayment of loan was regular and timely, he concludes that the economic activities of SHGs were successful leading to empowerment. Hust (2004) analysed in his study on political representation and empowerment in India, a research based on the experiences from Orissa, underlines that even though the quota system has acted favourably in strengthening the participation of women in politics but it has to be supplemented by additional credentials like awareness raising, literacy campaigns and economic independence. He also added that political participation in a congenial setting can procreate efficient women leaders.

Regarding political empowerment of women, Kumaran (1999) states that unsuitability of political work in the grass root level, fear of demoralisation, mental harassment and political assault are some of the factors that force women to refrain

from political participation. He categorizes the obstacles in this connection under three heads -namely money, mafia and manipulation.

Most of the researchers have demonstrated through their studies an intrinsic and instrumental value for empowerment. Even though, it is relevant at the individual and collective level, and can be economic, social or political but it provides little attention to the ways empowerment initiatives actually become enacted and incorporated into the organisational structure and practices. It was noted that there was a considerable gap between the rhetoric and practice (Ogden et.al, 2006; Huq, 2016). While analysing the review of the definitions of empowerment, it revealed both diversity and commonality. The range of studies identified and referred to comprehend a contextual understanding of empowerment seem to have integrated only the dimensions of power and the ability to make choices. Most of the literature focussed on the issues of gaining power and control over decisions and resources whereas others mostly took structural inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than individual characteristics. Robust arguments were mostly discovered in the research works of Kabeer (1999, 2000) which aided in operationalizing the concept of empowerment based on the background of the study.

2.5. Kudumbashree

“Kudumbashree” is a well-known poverty eradication project initiated by the government of Kerala in on 17th May 1998 with the mission to alleviate poverty in the state by 2008 by empowering women through collective action (Nidheesh, 2009). It was mainly the activities of participatory development in the early and mid-1990s which inspired the formation of this novel project. It is characterised as a women-oriented poverty eradication programme with women’s empowerment as one of its major goals – that is projected in the media (Devika and Thampi, 2007). Though local government institutions are not organically linked to Kudumbashree, they are active partners in the programme. Kudumbashree gained impetus since its inception and made inroads into literature as an empowering phenomenon demonstrating an outstanding approach in the context of women empowerment. Kudumbashree was conceived as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala

and NABARD implemented through Community Development Societies (CDS) of poor women, serving as the community wing of local governments. Kudumbashree is formally registered as the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM), a society registered under the Travancore Kochi literary scientific charitable societies Act 1955, and it has a governing body chaired by the state minister of LSG (Manoj, 2012).

Suneetha (2004) stated in her study that the GOK got triggered by the institutional innovations in participatory development of women, which led to the initiation of the state poverty eradication mission “Kudumbashee” in the year 1998.

Praveen and Suresh (2015) also discussed the evolution of Kudumbashree mission and stated that it can be traced back to the year 1987-88, when the UNICEF and Government of India jointly ventured to kick off the poverty alleviation programme entitled Urban Basic Services (UBS) in Kerala. Later, Government of Kerala also joined hands through its financial contribution when the programme was renamed as Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP) in 1992. The positives that emerged out of this programme inspired the government to commence the Community Based Nutrition Programme and Poverty Alleviation Project (CBNP and PAP) in 1994 under UNICEF assistance in the Malappuram district. The programme was of universal nature, covering both, rural and urban areas. It was decided to universalise the anti-poverty programme of Kerala under the title “Kudumbashree” in the year 1998 to stand in pace with the decentralisation experiments and transfer of power to local governments during the period 1995-96. The three tier network structure of Kudumbashree plays a crucial role in the performance of the programme. At the basic level is the neighbourhood groups (NHGs), consisting of 10-20 members including 5 office bearers. The NHG office bearers constitute the second level known as the Area Development Societies (ADS), and also select 7 executive members. At the apex is the Panchayat level Community Development Societies (CDS) formed by the ADS executives. This study also pointed out that the spread of Kudumbashree enabled the women in making prompt socio-economic decisions, earn better by aggregating the limited resources, inculcate the banking habit, and infuse self - belief in them.

According to a report by the planning commission of India (2009), under Kudumbashree, women organized themselves in a three tier Community Based Organization (CBO). The bottom is formed by the Neighbourhood groups (NHGs) comprising of 20-40 women members selected from poor families. Area Development Society (ADS) is formed at the mid - level called ward of local government by federating 8-10 NHGs. The highest tier called the Community Development Society (CDS) formed at the Village Panchayat level or at the municipality (town) or corporation (city) is a federation of ADSs. They work in close association with the urban and local bodies through a network of Community based Organizations working with women. A study by Nidheesh (2009) indicates that it is the organizational structure of Kudumbashree which provides opportunities for collective action by gathering women from poor background to help enhance their economic security. Kudumbashree was considered as unique while comparing with similar poverty alleviation initiatives in other States is because of the convergence of the community organization network in Kerala with the local government (Panchayati Raj) institutions (PRI). Such a convergence enables Kudumbashree to deploy a much larger volume of physical and financial resources in more focussed interventions to benefit poor families. It also provides opportunities for women to develop their leadership capabilities and rise to positions of responsibility and power in local governments (Kudumbashree, 1998). It was also cited in the Planning Commission report (2014) that how microenterprise act as a means of livelihood for the economic empowerment of women.

2.5.1. Kudumbashree and Empowerment

The scaling up of Kudumbashree has gone beyond increasing coverage. Initially it was considered as a project to improve nutritional status of mothers and children, but it has evolved into a multi-sectored poverty alleviation programme, scaling up functionally. It is facilitating empowerment of women through CBOs and local bodies. It primarily encourages the devolution of resources and power to the local women which aids them in enhancing their capability politically (Kadiyala, 2004).

It was Oommen (2008) who discussed the story of Kerala's Kudumbashree in his working paper as an anti-poverty programme which empowers not only women but also has proved to be beneficial for the wider community. As stated above, there lies a tremendous potential with the CBOs for enlarging and enhancing the freedoms and widening the capabilities and choices of poor women in the state. He also argued that through the micro finance structure and through its many-faceted activities, Kudumbashree seeks to empower women and through this process bring prosperity to the family. According to him, the term 'empowerment' used here signifies the process whereby the powerless women gain a greater share of control over resources and decision-making, be it in their family or in any other social institutions to which they get associated. In short, women are the ends as well as the means of the Kudumbashree project.

John (2009) in his work on Kudumbashree has observed a substantial impact on various sectors covering education, health, agriculture, animal husbandry, enterprise development and women empowerment through the numerous activities of this poverty alleviation programme. The women beneficiaries acquired the essential skills, confidence, knowledge, confidence and leadership qualities by associating themselves into the events of Kudumbashree. This in turn has also improved their status in family.

Dhanya and Sivakumar (2010) in their study noted that the income from Kudumbashree has accounted for a significant portion of the total income of the households under study. This is indicative of a positive impact of the development programme of Kudumbashree, which includes the dimension of motivation, overcoming the fear of authority, self-confidence, decision making and autonomy in the use of the resources in households.

A study by Kalyani and Seena (2012) showed that the economic independence achieved through Kudumbashree improved the social participation of its members, hence, leading to social empowerment of poor impoverished women flock.

Another illustration on the empowering capability of Kudumbashree was highlighted by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) (2008) in their working paper.

They explained how Kudumbashree has transformed the perception of hopelessness into a feeling of social being by arranging a platform for them to share their personal experiences. This was made possible by the formation a social network in their locality evoking a sense of social security. Through their involvement in micro enterprise activities, the women are now more confident and independent.

The study done by Nabavi (2009) has suggested the coordination between the micro enterprises and the SHG lending system. According to the study, such an association would aid those people who have been deprived of credit. It also emphasised an important role played by SHGs in promoting education, employment, meeting credit requirements, and knowledge generation in every country including Iran.

The Karve committee report of 1956 also considered the promotion of SSEs as a solution for shrinking the large volume of unemployment and under-development. There have been many significant changes in the approach towards women development and empowerment in the post - independence India. For instance, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India make it mandatory to reserve at least 1/3rd of the seats in local and urban elected bodies for women (Manoj, 2012).

In an article by Nambath (2012) it was found the impetus provided by Kudumbashree to Micro Enterprise Development. It was targeted as an opportunity for providing gainful employment to the people below poverty line and thereby improving their income and living standard. This study could also link empowerment and Kudumbashree. The sample of the study showed reasonably high levels of empowerment in the factors like freedom to spend and save earnings, expressing opinion in a discussion, confidence in promoting own enterprise and inspiration to undertake risk.

A study by Raghavan (2003) has also discussed the launching of the state poverty eradication programme called Kudumbashree by highlighting the various strategies employed by the mission to eradicate poverty using women who were initially regarded as voiceless and powerless. Resultantly, the formation of NHGs and SHGs has helped in the development of poor women into vibrant micro

entrepreneurs. He has also claimed in his case study on Kudumbashree that the morale, confidence and capacity of such poor women has gone up considerably high due to their participation in income generating - cum - developmental activities. He concluded the study by stating “Kudumbashree has proved without any doubt that women empowerment is the best strategy for poverty eradication. Women who were regarded as voiceless and powerless started identifying their inner power, their strength, opportunities for growth, and their role in reshaping their own destiny.”

Lathika (2008) in her study found that Kudumbashree had become successful in boosting the self-image levels of beneficiaries by offering the required knowledge and imparting the needed attitudinal change. She concludes that the new intakes nourished with the Kudumbashree endeavour aid in enhancing women capabilities thriving to occupy a good position in the empowerment arena.

Another study by Santosh Prabhu (2015) also discussed the working system of NHGs in a district of Kerala. He found the performance of the sample of study as satisfactory but also stressed the need to promote efficient initiatives for the betterment of women. This article proved that the improvement observed in the socio-economic status of these women was due to their participation in Kudumbashree. He viewed this project as an ideal and workable model of participatory development for eradicating poverty. The study was concluded by relating women empowerment with Kudumbashree project by observing economic development of the women who formed the sample of the study.

Nagayya and Rao (2009) in a study reviewed the trends in the SHG-Bank Linkage programme with special reference to Kudumbashree projects in Kerala among other similar organisations in south India. They observed that the formation of the grass root level organisation is the life blood of Kudumbashree mission. Through their study it was observed that the capability of poor woman had gone up in several fields leading to enhanced status of women in family and community. They concluded that the Kudumbashree scheme has gained national and international acclaim as an ideal and workable model of participatory development for eradicating poverty. In this work, women empowerment was seen as an

expansion of choice and action which ensures an increase in their authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect their life. Empowerment is considered as a process of increasing awareness, capacity building, acquiring greater decision making power and greater participation in socio-political process. There are numerous schemes, programmes and models for the enrichment of the conditions of women.

In a study by Shihabudheen (2013) in the field of applied economics, Kudumbashree's poverty eradication mission was referred to as following a holistic approach which believed that the elimination of poverty was possible only by making the powerless their own masters. Hence, women empowerment became the part of parcel of the poverty eradication mission of Kerala. This article also made reference to the unconventional methods adopted by the mission to identify poor people. Income was considered as the sole parameter which was recognized using household surveys conducted by the officials. The risk index was used as an effective tool to identify poor and it was first developed in the early stages of community development system, tried and experimented at 7 wards of Alappuzha, a central district in Kerala. The whole article was a case study on Kudumbashree which discussed the various activities and associated bodies of this mission. In this study, the author has undoubtedly remarked Kudumbashree mission as a strategic tool for poverty eradication and women empowerment. It was through this venture of the government of Kerala by which women started identifying their strength. Despite the remarkable achievements, he also highlighted certain clouded and hidden deficiencies, which work against the established goals of the mission affecting its sustainability. It was the over politicisation, the loss faced by micro enterprises, the cross borrowing practices, the misutilisation of funds etc. which had affected the overall working of the project.

Another study by Shihabudheen (2012) illustrated the presence of high empowerment potential for microenterprises working under Kudumbashree mission. There was a high scope of socio-economic and political empowerment of women due to their participation in these micro-enterprises. The study also noted that such micro enterprises significantly enhanced the individual and family empowerment of rural women by ensuring their freedom to spend and save

earnings. Simultaneously, it improved their confidence to promote own micro enterprises and also inspired them to undertake risk. The findings of the study also showcased that such enhanced ability to express their opinions in meetings or discussions made these women politically empowered making them better equipped to occupy responsible positions under Local Self Government (LSG)/ Panchayathi Raj Institutions (PRIs) /similar institutions. Preference was given to those women having experience of working under Kudumbashree while nominating or selecting people to different local bodies. It was meant to meaningfully utilize the skills and experiences of such women.

The Hindu (2005) reports, as cited by Jose, the decentralisation process has assisted to make Kudumbashree a success. Kudumbashree, in turn, the report adds, has aided to accelerate the growth pace of decentralisation by ensuring participation of members in Grama Sabhas and helping to identify the real beneficiaries. It further claims that Kudumbashree has succeeded in its efforts to provide income, employment and enterprise to poorer households, besides utilising the opportunities for participation in planning and governance thrown open by the decentralisation process.

Varghese (2014) discovered that with the increased reservation in LSGIs, there has been a terrific growth in the participation of women most prominently from Kudumbashree and driving force identified was the entry into the public life.

Tiwari (2008) in her study stated gender mainstreaming and poverty alleviation as some of the prime outcomes of Kudumbashree movement. She explained the need for financial security as a prerequisite to attain empowerment. It was the emergence of micro enterprises and income generating activities which had led the women in becoming self-reliant. She also indicated in her article that the Kudumbashree network ensures active participation of women in planning and development processes as they take part in preparing micro-plans at the NHGs level and higher level plans through both ADSs and CDSs, which are then integrated into the poverty eradication plans of local governments.

In an article by Sreeram et.al (2015), it was found that micro credit, entrepreneurship and empowerment form the three pillars of Kudumbashree which

has helped the mission to address the basic issues of less privileged women. It has succeeded in harnessing the entrepreneurial potential of rural women folk for their own development through collective action. He also pointed out that proper attention must be given to the variables like mass media exposure, extension contact, marketing facilities and management orientation as they were positively and significantly contributing to the most of the variation in entrepreneurial behaviour of members of Kudumbashree Neighbourhood Groups. It was also found in the study that mass media exposure, extension contact, marketing facilities and management orientation had positively and significantly contributed to most of the variation in entrepreneurial behaviour of members of Kudumbashree. This article discussed the role of the Kudumbashree officials in identifying the felt needs of the respondents like lack of economic independency, and motivate them to work for themselves by starting various microenterprises under the banner of Kudumbashree, so that they get organized very easily to meet their needs collectively.

A critical study by Devika and Thampi (2007) done on Kudumbashree initiative in Kerala also stated that Kudumbashree women do display self-confidence and a sense of agency. They have discussed the direct linkages between the Kudumbashree women and local political institutions. They also reiterated that certain feminist interventions are required to create a sharp awareness of the limitations of liberal and economic institutions and promote public discussions to ensure that the possibilities associated with these institutions are realised in full.

In another critical study done by Venugopalan (2014) on the impact of Kudumbashree over the empowerment of rural women found that some of the attributes like decision making power, personal skills, and the awareness of its members had improved but they were still lacking behind while considering the factors such as self-confidence and knowledge.

Uma (2006) in her study analysed the impact of State sponsored poverty reduction Programme like Kudumbashree on empowerment of women in Kerala. It was found that the income of the beneficiaries is not sustained due to competition from mechanized products and poor marketing of the products. She pointed out that

along with income and credit facilities measures like skill upgradation, better education and social and political conciseness to challenge the existing gender inequalities are needed to empower women. According to Irshad and Juman (2015), even though there are many pitfalls and shortcomings associated with Kudumbashree but the micro enterprises have successfully reached the “unreached” women through providing ways and means of living and financial independence. The study also depicts Kudumbashree project as essential for women’s active participation in social and economic life. Even though there are so many pitfalls and shortcoming. These micro units has been successful in reaching the unreached through providing ways and means of living and financial independence.

Santha (2007) at investigating the socio-economic status and problems of women entrepreneurs in Kerala and Tamil Nadu revealed that the major problem faced by the women entrepreneurs in Kerala was due to the financial insufficiency and adequate credit should not only be provided at the initial stage but also for expansion, diversification and modernization. She found that in both states, 86 percent of the women entrepreneurs have very high decision making power while enjoying a very high power in solving their business problems. They also possessed a very high leadership skill and were involved in social activities for mental satisfaction and social commitment.

In another critical study done by Ansari (2016), it was discovered that there was reinforced dependency observed amongst many women towards Kudumbashree which left them without a choice of questioning the tools provided and confirmed by Kudumbashree mission.

According to Mohan (2016) who did study on the Kudumbashree Enterprise Development training programmes, observed that the mission lacked the basic mechanism to assess the training needs of its entrepreneurs as most of the training sessions were too generic in content. Further, the author also added that the trainers were mostly graduates who lacked the skill and expertise to train women entrepreneurs, resulting in the loss and shutdown of their business.

The above discussions and research articles mostly concentrated on the empowerment aspect associated with the Kudumbashree mission. Most of the

studies have captured the positive features of Kudumbashree mission and the recent local body elections of 2015 held in Kerala, also proved the enhanced efficiency and visibility of women as Kudumbashree members when 52 per cent of Kudumbashree representatives won the poll battles across the State. Last year's election witnessed the SHGs evolving as the short key to success as all political parties picked candidates from the pool. The elected women also include 18 master trainers of the Mission. It was reported by the Hindu (2015) that such an increased acceptance of the Kudumbashree members among all the political parties should be viewed as the political empowerment achieved by the women's group, said T. Shahul Hameed, State Mission Officer, Kudumbashree Mission. There were similar regularities found in most of the studies which underplayed in exploring the social world through the participants. There was severe lacking on the subjective meanings assigned to the term empowerment by the respondents of most of the studies but a clear and concrete understanding of the working pattern of Kudumbashree mission was obtained through the referred research works.

2.6. Women Empowerment and ICT

“The Internet sparked a generalized upsurge of interest in ICTs, including a reinvigorated interest in how ICT might be applied in developing countries. At the same time, international development began to move back up the political agenda. This move received impetus from the search for concrete targets, emerging first as the International Development Goals in 1996, then formalized as the MDGs by the September 2000 Millennium Declaration, which sought particularly to reduce poverty while improving health and education and fostering gender equality. The 1998 World Development Report from the World Bank highlighted the role of information, knowledge, and ICT in development; the creation by the G8 countries of the Digital Opportunities Task Force in 2000 set an agenda for action on ICT4D; and the World Summits on the Information Society held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005 acted as key learning and policy-formation points along the ICT4D path.”(Heeks, 2008)

This explains and elucidates the wide variety of possibilities ICT can provide for poorer countries and disadvantaged people like women, access to the global opportunities. Such blending of computers and communication technologies have culminated network technologies to enhance the speed and reduce the cost of

communication whereby distance has become less relevant in commercial and business transactions (Mitter, 2004). Hence, ICTs have impacted hugely, the way our lives are organised. In fact, the defining characteristic of these new technologies is that they are ‘general purpose’, in that they permeate all realms and levels of society and transform the world of business, governance, social communication, education, amongst other spheres of our social and personal lives (Swamy, 2006). It was the phenomenal growth of microelectronics during the period 1970 to 1980 which led to information technology revolution. The ongoing ICT revolution got accelerated due to innovations in fibre-optics and satellite communication on the one hand and computer hardware and software on the other. Over the last decades, the world has witnessed unprecedented revolution in every aspect of ICT. ICTs became increasingly recognized as a powerful instrument for reducing poverty, providing good governance and facilitating sustainable development (Prasad and Sreedevi, 2007). The first digital computer put to use in a developing country was installed in Kolkata in 1956 at the Indian Institute of Statistics for scientific calculation work. From that early start until the 1990s, computing for development focused on two application emphases. Initially, government took the role of key actor and applied IT (ICT’s precursor) mainly to internal administrative functions of the public sector in developing countries. During the 1980s, multinationals and other firms came to the fore and viewed IT as a tool for delivering economic growth in the private sector (Heeks, 2008).

An International Telecommunication Union (ITU) study (2005) described ICTs as potentially powerful “development enablers”. On November 16, 2005, the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, Tunisia adopted the Declaration of Agreement in Support Of Girls and Women in Information and Communication Technology, which pointed out that “ICT allows women increased participation in political, social, and economic arenas and supports empowerment for themselves, their families, and their communities.” Simultaneously, development agencies, such as the World Bank, USAID and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) have substantially increased funding for ICT projects that specifically aim to empower women, such

as e-commerce, e-government, business development, and networking projects. (Maier and Reichert, 2007)

Swamy (2006) discussed three major approaches which can help to understand the way ICTs are conceived and adopted in national policies. The business approach draws primarily from the neo-liberal paradigm with the assertion that market is the core institution of modern capitalist societies and that both domestic and international politics are increasingly concerned with the making the markets function well (Cerny, 2004). In the second approach, ICTs are treated as “enablers” or tools to facilitate the achievement of a larger goal like increasing the effectiveness and reach of development interventions. In case of systems approach, there is a paradigmatic view, where ICTs are seen as transforming and reconstituting basic structures, institutions and relationships in the society. This view also advocates a pathway to acquire gender equality.

Narayana (2005) examines the issues of gender equality and empowerment of women in the emerging information economy. He points out that the most promising potential for women is in the creation of new jobs and work in data processing activities. He opines that the empowerment of women via technology enables them to challenge discrimination and overcome gender barriers. He also suggests to integrate gender perspectives in the development and implementation of national ICT policies, programmes and strategies, Increasing existing funding mechanisms to support women’s initiatives in ICT-based entrepreneurship, Encouraging greater participation of women in the ICT industry, Integrating ICT education in school curricula etc., to create an enabling environment that supports women’s participation in information economy and thereby enhance economic empowerment of women.

Suresh (2011) in his study stated that despite several setbacks, many social actors are using ICTs as a tool for social transformation and gender equality. He elucidated this statement with several examples like the E-governance programme initiated through ICTs for delivering government services in some cases worked with an explicit strategy to ensure these services reach women and others who face barriers to access. Health educators have used the radio to communicate

information related to women's sexual and reproductive health. Email, online newsletters have enabled women to communicate on a global scale, resulting in increased collaboration to push the agenda of gender equality.

Kelkar and Nathan (2002) have argued that ICTs have enormous potential to “redefine traditional gender roles” and that “the spread of IT-enabled services has been immensely beneficial to both women and men, especially those who have limited skills or lack of resources to invest in higher education.”

A study by Islam et.al (2006) found that, women's involvement in ICT industries and ICT based government organizations and Non – government organizations changes the behavioural aspects of women's lifestyle and affects the society as a whole.

It was also necessary to study the discourses on the concept of digital divide which showcased the prime reasons for the formation of programmes aiming at digital inclusion of minorities. While the potential of ICT for stimulating economic growth, socio- economic development and effective governance is well recognized, the benefits of ICT have been unevenly distributed within and between countries. The United Nations (2005) defined the term “digital divide” as the differences in resources and capabilities to access and effectively utilize ICT for development that exist within and between countries, regions, sectors and socio-economic groups. It is often characterized by low levels of access to technologies. Some of the reasons which have hindered the usage of technologies especially in developing countries include poverty, illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and language barriers. The enthusiasm over the rapid growth of ICT and their applications have generated a variety of initiatives to foster the use of ICT for development, including research, projects, workshops and other activities. Many of these initiatives are directed at addressing the growing digital divide. Increased attention is being paid to reviewing and evaluating the impact of these initiatives. The literature on the enormous opportunities for the digital inclusion of women is vibrant and wide ranging. Various examples were identified through different studies which demonstrates the huge scope for ICTs as a tool for women empowerment.

In a research work done by Jorge (2002), several examples demonstrating the business opportunities for women as owners and frequent users of cellular services were cited. The Grameen Phones program in Bangladesh, is an example of an initiative which sets Village Phone Operators to resell wireless telephone services. It has contributed greatly to women's economic empowerment and has increased cellular telephone use by women tremendously. In La Paz, Bolivia, many women working in the informal market and as street vendors carry a cellular telephone and many have established successful "phone shops" within their businesses. In the Dominican Republic, fixed wireless public telephones were installed in rural areas without service. Such telephones operated using phone cards and not only provided the community with a needed telephone service, but also helped rural women with an additional income, as they sold phone cards bought in bulk from the telephone company. Another example showcase the use of CD ROMs for illiterate women in Uganda illustrating that ICT can be used in creative ways and in ways that are more effective and affordable than other solutions such as browsing or obtaining the information via the Internet. There were cases of women's radio clubs in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, which provided a means to share information on development issues which shows that radio can be used well beyond a listening only device, and effectively become a successful two-way communication tool. The author also stressed that such programs should be developed and conducted by women and the content should reflect a gender sensitive perspective.

Similar study was conducted by Mijumbi (2002), who found that Uganda CD-ROM project based at the Nakaseke and Buwama telecentres developed a package of ICT-based learning materials about micro enterprise responding to the self-identified needs of rural women in Africa. They aimed to: a) increase women's access to information utilizing new ICTs; b) motivate women to use telecentres when looking for information; c) increase collaboration and networking opportunities among women and NGOs in Africa; d) involve community groups and technical teams in Uganda in the development of the materials; and e) develop a simple, highly visual, audio package of learning materials using local languages for use by rural women in Uganda with low literacy skills. She also indicated that

by accessing information through ICTs women can improve their situation because of the knowledge acquired and the information received.

Another study by Gurumurthy et.al (2010) elucidates the case of a project called Mahiti Manthana, launched in 2005 by the Indian NGO “IT for Change” which seeks to empower rural women through ICT. More precisely, through this project, women can access information on governmental services using rural telecentres. Furthermore, they promote radio and video based activities to help women to learn more about subjects crucial for empowerment. Such participatory and collective approach by developing non-textual tools mainly for illiterate women has had a positive impact on their self-confidence.

Hafkin (2002) in her research and analysis of selected *infoDev* projects found that the empowering effects experienced by women at the individual level was not necessarily direct economic benefits from these ICT-based development projects. She also argued that in those instances where they gained benefits from those projects, they “emerged not only with greater knowledge but also with enhanced self-esteem”. In addition to increased confidence, the women gained career and professional possibilities.

Another case by Dass (2011) reveals the ICT planning for SEWA which focussed on their MMS (Membership Management System). This was pointed out as a very typical exercise for an organization catering to the downtrodden and self-employed women across the nation.

Drucker (2001) in his study calls ICT as the “great equalizer” and many studies (Hafkin and Taggert, 2001; Nath, 2001; Haflan, 2002; Huyer, 2005) have identified convincingly that the access to and effective use of ICTs can contribute to women empowerment and capacity building in numerous ways.

Certain other examples which indicate women gaining knowledge, self-esteem and status in their community and profession include the project in Ethiopia where women gained knowledge in Internet networking, management, and gender and development issues; the Auxiliary Nurse Midwives in India, who were trained

and provided with personal data assistants (PDAs) to support their data-gathering activities in the field (Huyer and Sikoska, 2003).

A study by Klason (2016) conducted in Malawi also indicated that increased use of ICTs for gathering Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information can further the empowerment of young women because of enhanced access to knowledge.

In a study by Mehta and Mehta (2014), it was observed that the use of mobile phone has significant contributing to empowerment of women from rural areas. They also argued in their study that the government should provide tax exemptions to encourage private mobile operators and facilitate them for better mobile infrastructure and services in rural areas. Subsidy or waiver should be provided to rural people, especially women, in order to encourage and give them the opportunity to participate in the mainstream development.

Another study by Wikman (2016) showed the valuable role played by mobile phones in enhancing participation of women in CBOs. However, the study also observed that the digital gender divide and ICT related risks that women face also have organizational implications that have to be considered by CBOs when utilizing ICT.

In an article by Pankan and Radhakrishnan (2016), it was observed that In order to overcome the obstacles of women's access to ICT in India, e-governance was introduced. They also pointed out that such e-governance initiatives catalyses the process of women's empowerment by opening up avenues for women to freely articulate and share their experiences, concerns and knowledge, creating their possibility of their future enrichment. It can help the women to broaden the scope of their activities and address key issues and concerns.

As the present study focusses on Kerala, therefore, it was a necessity to cover the literature on the potentially outstanding IT enabled projects of Kerala. Though the preference was provided to gender focussed government interventions which used ICT as a tool to liberate women. Hence, literature was collected on the *Akshaya* project of the Government of Kerala which led to the dramatic emergence

of IT enabled people and organizations another set of literature was obtained on Kudumbashree IT Enterprises (KITEs) which were meant to address only women.

Kerala has been considered to be unique in many aspects as compared to the rest of India. In spite of having a poor economy, lower per capita income and unemployment the State of Kerala has been known to achieve a quality of life, which is higher than all the other States in India as well as other developed countries (Vijayan, 2006). According to 2011 Census Report, in Kerala there are 1084 females per 1000 males and female literacy rate is 92.07 percent. The position of women in Kerala has improved dramatically according to the conventional human development indicators and can even be compared to that of advanced countries (Pankan and Radhakrishnan, 2016). Women empowerment programmes were an important part of programmes introduced by the government to support gender equality. Though the empowerment of women is closely linked to the opportunities they have in education, health, economic and political participation but the Government has been rationalizing through legislative and programmatic interventions for mainstreaming gender into the development planning process.

2.6.1. Akshaya Enterprises

The Akshaya project was implemented by the IT Department, Government of Kerala, to extend the benefits of ICTs to all citizens. It was a public-private collaboration to impart basic computer training to at least one representative from each household as part of its mass e-Literacy drive.

Neelamalar and Kuttan (2008) identified three facets of Akshaya project:

- Facilitate the access to technology for all sections and region.
- Develop competence and skill-sets to enable use of IT by all sections of society.
- Content provision in Malayalam language on topics of local relevance.

Project called Akshaya started with the noble intention of making at least one member in each of the families e-Literate. The operations of Akshaya as unfolded so far consist of three distinct phases. The first phase is that of enabling the masses by imparting basic skill in computer operations and making them

familiar with internet. This phase is the period of e-literary training. During the second phase, the beneficiaries were grouped into different categories like students, homemakers, old aged etc. Training was provided to these groups based on their requirements. In the third phase, the project envisaged the launching of various IT-related services and linking of governmental services to 'Akshaya' centre. The pilot project started in Malappuram, and was inaugurated by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President of India on 18th November 2002 (<http://www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in/index.php/e-literacy>). Malappuram was declared as the first e-literate district in India.

In a report by a leading NGO called IT for change (2006), it was found that in case of certain women run Akshaya telecenters, other women, including the elderly, come confidently to the telecenters to make use of the services offered there including internet telephony, payment of bills, surfing the net, etc. Women in Malappuram felt that they need to be computer literate in order to teach their children and also, most of the households have one person working in Gulf region, which makes it a necessity to use internet telephony to stay in touch with their relatives at a low cost.

Gurumurthy et.al (2005) also stated in their study that the demand for such an initiative came from the local community. A very large number of people are employed in West Asia which made it a necessity for the family members to equip themselves with the required e-literacy to stay in contact with their relatives.

Another study done on the project states that the prime cause for the initiation of Akshaya was to facilitate the access to technology to all sections and regions of the state, to facilitate the development of competence and skill-sets to enable use of IT by all sections of society, and to facilitate the development of content in regional languages on topics of local relevance. The centres are created and run by entrepreneurs and manned by trained personnel. They have support facilities like web-cams, scanners, printers, fax machines etc. In addition to opening up a wealth of data, Akshaya also offers specific information tailor-made to the requirements of the Keralite. A wide range of subjects including education, career development, agriculture, health, Information Technology, law and justice etc. have

been targeted. Self-development modules covering spoken English, vocational training, personality development, career planning, accounting etc. are available (Sahu, 2006).

It was identified through the literature that Akshaya was not meant for any gender specific activities but its prime intention was deployment of government services electronically. Still there are some studies which associate the factor of women empowerment with Akshaya.

In a study by Pankan and Radhakrishnan (2016), it was found that of the total number of Akshaya entrepreneurs, 57.69 percent were women. 96.15 percent of total staffs of Akshaya are women Therefore, it was analysed that the women play a worthwhile role in the prestigious e-governance project of Kerala.

It was in the study by Mukhopdhyay and Nandi (2007), where Akshaya was regarded as a gender neutral project. They also suggested that it could have supported the women entrepreneurs to become role models for all other women with similar ambitions and aspirations.

2.6.2. Kudumbashree IT Enterprises

KITEs form another set of ICT programmes which are gender intensive and designed for women empowerment using ICT as tools. There was very few literature available which explicit the organizational structure and practice of this institution. Well, some of the studies determined to unravel the status of women working under KITEs.

A study by Chandrasekhar and Siva Prakash (2011) showed that Kudumbashree women ICT initiative has got enormous prospective as a wonderful tool for empowering and uplifting the poor women class and also social and economic obstructions could be effectively triumph over through this innovative programme.

It was the study by Prasad and Sreedevi (2007) which clearly explained the initiation of KITEs. It was pointed out through the article that such ICT micro-enterprises, owned by the self-help groups of poor women were promoted in the

state as a part of the project for poverty eradication. This showed a deviation from the usual self-employment schemes of the women in the state, which were predominated by tailoring, followed by dairying, poultry farming, food-processing etc. The success of the Kudumbashree units shows that the application of ICT offers many new opportunities for women.

According to Duncombe et.al (2005), women based ICT enterprises are those if they cannot exist without ICT and are majority owned or managed by women. Typical examples would include any women's cooperative assembling personal computers and running own telecentres or cybercafé. It can represent those enterprises which manage a shop selling computer supplies or providing IT training classes. Even a women designing websites for local business belongs to the group of women ICT based enterprise.

The authors have also broadly categorised these enterprises into three types of ICT based enterprises:

- Those producing ICTs as an enterprise output: enterprises that produce hardware, software and telecommunications products.
- Those using ICTs as a primary, processing technology: enterprises that provide data entry services, ICT-based business services, software customisation, ICT- based distance learning, etc.
- Those providing other ICT-related support activities: enterprises that provide computer training, consultancy and other services.

Maier and Reichert (2007) pointed out through their study that such women owned ICT-based businesses which were affiliated with their sponsor agency, Kudumbashree had women as the owner of the means of production, thus reforming ownership norms and helping other women with their businesses. Women themselves were in charge of the production and were involved in distribution and sales logistics. In case of a Kasargode facility, northern most district of Kerala there were 10 women members who handled assembling, installation and marketing of the digitized commodity. This led to greater knowledge, income and empowerment.

Arun et.al (2010) noted in their study that all cooperative enterprises were owned, managed and operated by women from poor families. They were mostly

data entry units who were trying to move up the value chain into basic software and Web development work. Most of the women possessed high levels of human capital in terms of educational qualifications and further technical training. They also stated that these women through their participation had attained increased levels of both personal and professional skills ranging from human resource management, marketing, personal skills, and flexibility.

2.7. Summary of the ideas from Literature

While looking at the discussions presented in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that the many countries including the developing nations prioritised the use of ICT on account of the various perceived development potential of technology. It was observed that the proliferation ICT as an effective tool for development resulted in the formulation of several international, national policies, schemes, projects and reforms.

A careful examination of academic and policy literature showcases that governments, NGOs and other development actors seem to be fascinated by the range of outcomes possible through a single intervention (Gopakaumar, 2014). As a result, the component of ICT was incorporated into the gender specific policies meant for minority groups with an intention to uplift them socially, economically and politically. Such an attempt to conjoin ICT and public participation led to the foundation of several ICT programmes which are intended to work effectively for empowering people from grassroots. This was followed by an integration of gender perspectives in the development policies, programmes and strategies, encouraging greater participation women in the ICT industry.

The concept of empowerment was operationalized out of the wide variety of literature available for the research. The studies of Kabeer (1999, 2000) was the prime conceptual work which aided in defining the context of empowerment based on the background of the study. With regard to KITEs, significant gaps were identified regarding the knowledge on women empowerment which seemed to have become an inseparable part of such gender focussed programmes. There was ambiguity in the explanations on how the programme got implemented and

sustained till this date. A historical analysis was lacking which elucidate the present status of KITEs. There was inadequate literature available that could demonstrate the organizational structure associated with KITE. Though it remains the only ICT programme meant and targeted for women, there a lot of alienation found in terms of its visibility amongst literatures. Even though Akshaya consists of women entrepreneurs but its ideology and objectives differed from the gender focussed ICT programmes.

The study was basically an exploration to unravel the aspects associated with women empowerment, ICT and government policies. Due to lack of required literature, rigorous efforts were taken to gain knowledge on the one and only ICT programme for women in Kerala.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the methodological apparatus employed in the study. It also comes across the conceptual framework operationalized for the better inclusion of the subjects considered in the study. The analytical capabilities of ANT was also employed in the study. Through ANT, the researcher has attempted to capture the complexities associated with the formation of KITEs. As discussed in the previous chapter, there were very limited studies which dealt with the initiation of KITEs. In this study, the researcher has for the first time tried to understand the beginning of the one and only Government ICT programme for women in Kerala using ANT. Concept of translation and OPP are used to trace the introduction of ICT enterprises into the digitization process which was happening during the early 1990s.

The theoretical capabilities of functional simplification, integration, translation and empowerment was used to understand the core social transactions amongst the women beneficiaries. There are primarily three research questions which try to unveil the empowering characteristics of the ICT programme meant for women. The study is qualitative in nature which gave enough scope for the researcher to define and re-define the social changes which were the results of their participation in such programmes.

The research adopted is interpretive in nature and has used a cohort embedded case study approach. Data collection was done with the help of multiple methods. The research involved the rigorous analysis of a gender sensitive Government initiated ICT programme meant for women empowerment.

3.2. Research questions

As discussed in the first chapter, the primary question that this study likes to address is the following:

Do Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala hold the strategic approach to enhance women's capabilities?

Related sub-questions include:

- (a) What led to the genesis of the Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?
- (b) What are the controlling and liberating factors affecting women due to the adoption of Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?
- (c) How does Government ICT programme for women construct empowerment in its social, economic and political domains?

The functioning of Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala was analysed based on the above stated research questions. The aspects related to the empowerment of women who adopted these ICT programmes was also delineated in this study. We would now discuss the underlying philosophical perspectives of the study.

3.3. The Philosophical underpinning

It is necessary to understand the underlying epistemology which guides research (Myers, 1997). It can be defined as the most pertinent philosophical assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Hirschheim, 1992). Following the works of Chua (1986) and Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), one could categorise the basic paradigms followed in the IS research into positivist, interpretive and critical. In the IS area, several attempts have been made to review and classify research approaches (Cheon, Groven and Sabherwal, 1993; Galliers, 1992; Galliers and Land, 1987; Mingers, 2001, 2003; Nandhakumar and Jones, 1997; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1995). This diversity of approach

in IS research is prevalent because information system, broadly defined, draws on and provides a nexus for many diverse research fields and disciplines (Mingers, 2001). As the discussions on these aspects are prevalent, the researchers in IS continue to shed more light on these approaches (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1995; 2006; Hirschheim et.al, 1996; Choudrie and Dwivedi, 2005; Bagozzi, 2011, Gopakumar, 2014).

The three fold classification of research epistemologies: positivist, critical and interpretive are philosophically distinct (as ideal types), however, in the practice of social science research these distinctions are not always so clear cut (Lee, 1989). Following is a depiction of these three philosophical perspectives.

Positivist studies generally assume that reality is objectively given and is described by measurable properties which are independent of the observer (Myers, 1997). In line with Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), positivist studies can be defined as those studies which are premised primarily to test theory, in an attempt to understand the predictive phenomena which are typically investigated with structured instrumentation. From an ontological perspective, reality is seen as having an objective existence on its own independent of human experience (Morgan and Burrell, 2004). Positivists are epistemologically concerned on the hypothetic deductive testing of theories. They allow verification or falsification of scientific knowledge seeking generalized results. These results with their causal linkages are presented with a tight coupling among explanation, prediction and control (Orkowski and Baroudi, 1991; Chen and Hirschheim, 2004). Hence, positivist IS research distinguish themselves with formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variables, hypothesis testing, and the drawing of inferences about a phenomenon from the sample to a stated population (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Myers, 1997).

Critical researchers assume social reality as historically constructed (Myers, 1997). Critical studies aimed at critically analysing and exposing the structural contradictions within social systems (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Critical philosophers view explanations as temporal and context bound. They view truth as hammered out and grounded in social and historical practices (Chua, 1986).

The main task of critical analyst is to act as a social critique to suppress the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo (Klein and Myers, 1999). This is based on the assumption that people have the inherent potential to act and change their social conditions restrained by socio-cultural and political factors (Klein and Myers, 1999; Gopakumar, 2014). The intent of critical inquiry is to facilitate clarification of the meaning of human need and expansion of autonomy in personal and social life (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). It seeks to be emancipatory by focussing on the elimination of unwarranted alienation and domination to enhance the opportunities for realizing human potential (Hirschheim and Klein, 1994; Klein and Myers, 1999). All these creates an environment for dialectical analysis which attempts to reveal the historical, ideological, and contradictory nature of existing social practices (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991).

Interpretivists view reality as socially constructed and not as objectively determined (Husserl, 1965; Walsham, 2006; Gopakumar, 2014). It is pointed out in the assumption that access to reality is through socially constructed notions of language, consciousness and shared meanings (Boland, 1985; Myers, 1997). Walsham (1995) argued that, in this view, it is not possible to obtain value free data, since the enquirer guides the process of enquiry using his or her preconceptions based on the interactions with the human subjects of the enquiry. Dependent and independent variables are not predefined, but it concentrates on the complexities of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Hence, “objective” or “factual” account of events are rejected, seeking relativistic, shared understanding of phenomena (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Prime intention of interpretive researchers are to unveil the fundamental structure of a phenomenon. Interpretive research paradigm follows the underlying philosophy of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Klein and Myers, 1999). In IS research, interpretive methods of enquiry aim at constructing an understanding of the context and processing pattern of the information system, where by it influences and is influenced by the context (Walsham, 2006). Interpretivism favours the use of qualitative data for understanding a phenomenon (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). This approach can be used by IS researchers as it effectively supports the understanding of the various perspectives associated with the introduction, implementation and

use of ICT in social and organizational context (Klein and Myers, 1999; Gopakumar, 2014).

The present study adopts mixed approaches that favours both interpretive and positivist philosophies in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of empowerment amongst women of Kerala as an implication of the multifunctional role played by Government ICT programmes which intend to enhance the capability of women by using ICT tools. The researcher has also made an effort to showcase certain critical evaluations by questioning the social reality and social systems to unveil the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the social structures under investigation (Chua, 1986; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1999). For a firm understanding and guidance on the IS research approaches, many illustrious research works were considered (Yin, 1981; Benbasat, 1987; Pettigrew, 1990; Walsham, 1995; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1999; Klein and Myer, 1999; Yin, 2003; Gopakumar, 2014). There is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms shedding light on the pragmatic rule or “maxim” which states that the meaning of an expression or a reality has to be determined by the practical consequences of it in the world (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This methodological pluralism or eclecticism provides a ground for multiple data collection methods which have been detailed later in the chapter.

3.4. Problematizing the phenomenon

The literature review provided a detailed description of the various intricate ways involved in the formation of an ICT supporting environment in the society of Kerala. The concept of social change and development was illustrated along with different strands of literature which includes women empowerment, ICT and entrepreneurship. As discussed before, the primary research question that this study addresses is *Do Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala hold the strategic approach to enhance women’s capabilities?* The institutional nature of ICT, its social shaping, management, integration and the needs which took to the formation of certain women led micro enterprises known as KITEs (Kudumbashree IT Enterprises) were observed through this study.

The study specifically addressed the question: *What led to the genesis of the Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?* A retrospective case analysis of KITEs is provided as a chapter which deals with the prime factors that led to the innovation and formation of these micro-enterprises under the guidance of Kudumbashree Mission or State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM). The term micro-enterprise denotes a business operating on a very small scale where the investment does not exceed 50 lakh rupees (GOI, 2014). In this study, these micro enterprises form the part of Government ICT programme for women which utilize digital artefacts for functioning. The researcher mapped the historical data about them providing a greater latitude in understanding the integrating factors that led to the initiation of Government ICT programmes targeting women as its beneficiaries. The discussions helped to theorise the notion of translation with its four “moments” which includes problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation. These are explained in the forthcoming chapters. While most studies have looked at its gender dimensions by focussing on the social, economic and political aspects but this study is looking at the interactions between the institutional actors which sustains the functioning of this one and only Government ICT programme for women. This section has also discussed the reason by answering certain vital questions like: *“Is it the nature of the work? Or is it the kind of technology used at the service level?”* which led to the integration of women into this collective action.

With the description on the nature of the work it becomes indispensable to determine the sanctioning experienced by these women working under the coercive pressure of the only women led Government ICT programme in Kerala. Therefore, the present study has also addressed the question: *What are the liberating and controlling factors affecting women due to the adoption of Government ICT programme for women in Kerala?* The institutional actions and dynamics are the result of the efficiency, futurity, working rules and strategies correlated with the controlling and liberating factors of the collectivity. Controlling factors are those that have a coercive pressure against the tendencies to deviate. The study used various methods like group discussions, interviews and Venn diagrams to reflect on the decentralized and centralized mode of control experienced by the actors. Liberating factors enhance the probability of gaining opportunities and resources.

Both allocative and authoritative resources formed the part of this observation. This helped to theorise the notion of structuration, control theory, group solidarity, integration, rationality and Actor-Network theory. Various theoretical insights of Castells (1999, 2002), Pozebon and Diniz (2012), Latour (1996), Callon (1986), Walsham and Sahay (2006) are some of the researchers whose work were referred during the explanations.

Another very important question addressed in this study is: *How does Government ICT programme for women construct empowerment in its social, economic and political domains?* Many studies have been conducted highlighting the concept of empowerment essential for the sustenance of these programmes. The word empowerment bears different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts which includes the terms like self-strength, control, power, self-reliance, own choice, decision making, independence, awakening and capability (UNICEF, 2001). In this study, the researcher has not only associated the widely accepted worldly definitions of empowerment but has also explored into the local terms and meanings given by these respondents to their own experiences of empowerment if any. This was a self- reflexive exercise initiated by the researcher so that they could “look at self”. It is synonymous with Cooley’s (1902) theory on “looking glass self”. The instrumentality and intrinsic value of empowerment at the individual and collective level has been explained in this study under the social, economic and political domains. Various insights of Kabeer (1999), Weber have been referred in different parts of this section.

3.5. Conceptual Framework

The epistemological belief embedded in interpretive research is that the social process is not deduced by formulating hypothesis, covariances or degrees of freedom but understood by getting involved inside the world of those generating it (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Rosen, 1991). Interpretive research asserts that social reality is constructed by the individuals through their action and interaction. Thus, understanding these social processes requires understanding of the social context which includes the meanings, practices, roles and tacit norms shared by humans working towards some shared goals (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). In

order to get a fundamental notion of the actor's view of the social world and their role in it, a rigorous preliminary analysis was employed to delineate the concepts required for the study. Apart from focussing on the immediate aims, events and actions of these Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala, this study has understood the roots of the encountered social changes experienced by the women beneficiaries. The abstract concepts were concretized by operationalizing with the use of indicators and procedures that was used to observe or measure them. It demonstrates the specific way of making these concepts meaningful which are relevant only to this study.

3.5.1. ICT programmes

Origins of “development” as a discipline is often attributed to Harry Truman's speech in 1949 where he claimed to adopt a bold new move by introducing programs that would embark the benefits of scientific advances and industrial progress for the welfare of underdeveloped areas (Ratan and Bailur, 2007). The 1990s saw the potential development of ICT enabled systems which took the form of Government policies and projects aiming effective use of ICT to enhance people's awareness on health, e-governance and agricultural applications for rural population and simultaneously creating business opportunities (Kuriyan et.al, 2008). In India, the telecom sector developed in its economic and social sphere with rural subscriber base of 370.08 million out of total 922.04 million mobile connections as on 31st January 2014 (Planning Commission, 2014). Many studies indicated an increasing gap between nations and individuals with regard to their access to information dragging them into a disadvantaged position (Cullen, 2001; Hafkin and Taggart, 2001; Chen and Wellman, 2004; Chinn and Fairlie, 2006; Thomas and Parayil, 2008; Clarke et.al, 2013). A major emphasis was given on the global level to establish government policies which attempt to establish an equal and effective opportunity to underprivileged people enabling them to participate fully in the educational, social and economic activities and democratic processes. These include: people on low incomes, people with lower educational qualifications or with low literacy levels, the unemployed, elderly people, people in isolated or rural areas, people with disabilities, sole parents, elderly people, women and girls (Cullen, 2001). A number of studies substantiated concern about a divide taking

place along the gender lines (Huyer and Carr, 2002; Huyer and Sikoska, 2003; Ng and Mitter, 2005; Faulkner and Lie, 2007; Hilbert, 2011; Miller and Shrum, 2011; Wamala, 2012; Gurumurthy and Chami, 2014; Venugopal, 2014).

Kerala, the southern state in south India, known for its high levels of human development index and literacy rate has a booming service sector of which IT sector is a part (Pillai and Shanta, 2011). It was in the backdrop of decentralisation when Kerala experienced remarkable radical change in its structural and functional aspects of its public policy (Franke and Chasin, 2000). The Government of Kerala envisaged e-governance as a prime step to augment a massive change in its administration by making it fast and transparent (Radhakumari, 2006). As part of this, special projects for women were developed and simultaneously women elected officials and activists were encouraged to participate more fully and effectively in public life. A deliberate attempt to conjoin ICT and public participation, led to the foundation of several ICT programmes to effectively empower people from grass roots. Human organisation were formed as a result of these policies where people used information and technologies in working out innovations. Therefore, the concept of ICT programmes in this study depicts those initiatives which are the outcome of “gender focussed” Government of Kerala interventions that requires application of ICT as a major force in the mode of production.

3.5.2. Women

Etymologically, the term woman denotes “an adult female human”. This meaning seems ambiguous in terms of conceptual definitions related to any research work. Therefore, it is required to operationalize it with the help of indicators to elucidate the exact meaning of “women” used in this study. In this study, women represent the beneficiaries between the age group of 25 – 60 years who have more than five years of entrepreneurial experience in an ICT programme for women, innovated by the Government of Kerala. More years of experience would increase the probability of obtaining objective, normative and imperative responses to add to the interpretive understanding of their social action. It has the potential to produce deep insights into information systems phenomena to know its sociology, management and development.

3.5.3. Empowerment

Empowerment, above all, is a derivative of power, albeit the concept of power is generally left unspecified (Beteille, 1999). The concept of power is mostly linked to the subject of social stratification. The best known definition of power is that of Max Weber in *Economy and Society* (1920) as “the chance of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action”. This is a very capacious conception as it includes phenomenon of coercion, domination and manipulation (Beteille, 1999). Inequalities in the distribution of power leads to the outcome of “class” and “status” which are the two principle dimensions of it (Scott and Marshall, 2009).

There is a wide literature available on empowerment issues which acknowledge the conceptualization and measurement of women empowerment relating with variables of international development (Mehra, 1997; Kabeer, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2012; Huyer and Sikoska, 2003; Mitter, 2004; Parker, 2005; Swamy, 2006; Eyben et.al, 2008; Varghese, 2011; Sohail, 2014; Torri and Martinez, 2014). The World Conference of the UN Decade for Women held at Copenhagen in the year 1980 defined development including women’s development which should not be viewed as an issue but as an essential component in every dimension of development (Sahay, 1998). Analysis of the impact of developmental plans and programmes for Indian women by the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988 – 2000 authorizes continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors – economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal (ibid) demanding their empowerment in all walks of life. UNDP report (2015) argues that women are in a disadvantaged state in the field of both paid and unpaid work.

There is a synergy between work and human development where work provides income, enhances livelihood conditions and human development builds knowledge, skills and awareness increasing human capital, opportunities and choices which in turn forms the foundation of empowerment in the social, economic and political domains. There are various conceptual and theoretical explanations on the concept of empowerment (Mehra, 1997; Kabeer, 1999, 2012; Kabeer et.al 2011; Huyer and Sikoska, 2003; Sohail, 2014; Varghese and Mavoothu, 2014).

To operationalize the conceptual meaning of empowerment, the researcher had to sort out the accepted meanings, discussed them with scholars, field experts and key informants, analyse them in order to evaluate them, then reconstitute the whole concept anew. Therefore, in this study empowerment is the process of implementing agency in the social system where the plurality of actors interact with each other in a physical environment to achieve valued ways of what Kabeer (1999) refers to as ‘being and doing’.

Apart from illustrating a broad definition of empowerment, this study has also focussed on the social, economic and political domains of the empowerment experienced by these respondents. The following are the operationalized definitions of social, economic and political empowerment which are relevant to the present study.

3.5.4. Social empowerment

In this study, it is the process involving both internal and external change that finds expression in the ability to “look at self”, act and implement the practical knowledge, the information, skills, perform collective actions and construct an environment for undistorted communication. There are six social empowerment indicators used in this study namely reflexive, expressive, futuristic, social capital, mobility and solidarity which were subdivided into further indicators. These indicators explicitly define social empowerment and were measured based on the responses to questions asked to the respondents.

3.5.5. Economic empowerment

In this study, it is the process of accumulating capital through the collective labour performed to exercise greater control over forces of production, relations of production and life choices. There are four indicators namely instrumental, human capital, producer and progressive which define the economic aspects of these women entrepreneurs with respect to empowerment.

3.5.6. Political empowerment

In this study, it is defined as the process of transformation from a passive to an active state reinforcing the ability to determine the direction of change in case of

circumstances and events. The researcher has explained the three indicators namely administrative, accountable and participant.

All the indicators of social, economic and political empowerment have been further sub-divided into various related indicators which are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

3.6. Research design

Research designs are the logical blue prints which links research questions, the data collected and the strategies used for analysing data to assure that the study's findings will represent the intended research questions (Yin, 2011). The present research employs mixed method approach. The qualitative methodology was applied as the conduct of research required immersion in the context with the attempt to understand the way others construct, conceptualize and perceive social reality (Kaplan and Duchon, 1988). This study adopted an explanatory cohort interpretive embedded case study design (Yin, 1981; Pettigrew, 1990; Walsham, 1993; 1995; Baxter and Jack, 2008). This study has focussed to answer many 'how' and 'why' questions relevant to its subject matter. Also, the researcher did not have any control over the contextual conditions while uncovering the phenomenon. The study focussed on the research phenomenon within its natural context. All these make case study design as an appropriate strategy to investigate the state of the art and to generate theories from practice (Yin, 1981; Benbasat et.al, 1987; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Following Bonoma (1985) and Yin (1981) certain quantitative aspects were highlighted in the case method to provide a fuller picture of the object of study. It was required to use this method as one of the research question deals with the multifaceted role assigned to the Government ICT programme for women in Kerala. The researcher has not represented the obtained data using complex statistical analysis, but a diagrammatic or tabular representation of the demographic aspects of women participating in the Kudumbashree IT enterprises is shown quantitatively. A longitudinal and retrospective look at the case was essential for explaining and describing the context. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research studies are well established in the field of IS studies for providing a richer,

contextual basis for interpreting and validating research (Kalpan and Duchon, 1988; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1995).

The study came across Kudumbashree IT enterprises as these were the only Government initiated ICT programme for women. Hence, the research was primarily based on an empirical study of these Kudumbashree IT enterprises in the south Indian state of Kerala. There are other cases of programmes of ICT utility like IT@school and Akshaya. IT@school is a project of Department of General Education, Government of Kerala, set up in 2001, to foster the IT education in schools and which on a longer term would facilitate ICT enabled education in the state. The Project has brought in a new culture of learning wherein the teachers would transform themselves into IT enablers, by handling their subjects more efficiently using ICT. Akshaya was conceived as a landmark ICT project by the KSITM to bring the benefits of this technology to the entire population of the State. The initial modus of this establishment was to provide e-literacy which got functionally operational into the spheres of citizen services. The project became a catalyst in creating massive economic growth and creation of direct and indirect employment in the State by focussing on the various facts of e-learning, e-transaction and e- governance. By understanding the various structural and functional dimensions of these programmes it was found that they differed from the gender specific praxis followed by Kudumbashree IT enterprises. Appropriation of a comparative study was disregarded due to the elaborate factors that had to be considered while studying them. The activities covered by them are also different raising a scope for another study. Hence the study in effect explored the case of Kudumbashree IT enterprises which involves women entrepreneurs from all across the State.

3.6.1. Case study Design

The present study is based on an explanatory embedded case design. An embedded case study is attempted when the case contains more than one sub unit of analysis (Yin, 2003). The case in this study is a micro enterprise under Kudumbashree State Mission or State Poverty Eradication Mission which adopted ICT tools for the functioning of their enterprise. The study could be conducted on

a more concrete form as the design allowed the researcher to focus on the associated actors and institutions. Though many writers have criticized case study as methodologically incapable of generalising conclusions (Gopakumar, 2014). But some authors like Lee (1989) and Yin (2003, 2011) have argued that it is possible to generalise case study findings to theoretical propositions. Along with them many writers in the IS research field (Lee and Baskerville, 2003; Walsham, 1993, 1999; Klein and Myers, 1999) have pointed out the dependability and generalizability of case studies.

3.6.2. Components of research design

These logical blueprints are helpful in linking the research questions, the data to be collected, and the strategies for analysing the data in order to address the study's research questions (Yin, 2011). A good logical design ensures that the researcher collects the right kind of data and utilises it in the most appropriate way in obtaining the research objectives (Gopakumar, 2014). The components of research design include: (a) study's questions, (b) propositions, (c) unit of analysis (d) the logic linking to the proposition (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2003). The research questions have been already discussed, hence the other four components are explained below.

Theoretical propositions helped the researcher to identify where to look for required relevant evidence. They also set the boundaries of the study by specifically focussing on the scope of the study (Yin, 2011).

The unit of analysis in a study could be an individual, group, organisation, events, decisions, programmes, process etc. (Benbasat et.al, 1987, Yin, 2011). The understanding of the concrete focal unit is essential for constructing research questions and to maintain the focus of the study. The study employed an embedded cohort case study design where Unnathi consortium, which is a formal group of KITEs was taken as the unit of study. A single group of five woman entrepreneurs between the age group of 25 – 60 formed the unit of analysis for this study. The state of Kerala was stratified into north, central and south regions based on its geographic features and the whole 63 KITEs were studied with five women entrepreneurs in each group. Subsequent field visits were carried out from

December 2013 to March 2015. To confirm the details many telephonic conversations were also carried out with 14 respondents.

The analysis of qualitative data usually moves through five phases: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting and (e) concluding (Yin, 2011). It is rigorous process due to the lack of any step by step strategies for analysing case study data. In this mixed method study, the researcher has used both quantitative and qualitative aspects to depict information gathered through field work. Quantitative data was analysed using simple statistical tools whereas qualitative data was analysed by employing theoretically significant propositions. Following Yin, case study evidence was analysed against the background of theoretical framework inductively relying on the principle of hermeneutics. Plausible explanations were derived out of the information gathered through field work.

The principle of hermeneutics was used for interpreting data. It provides the philosophical grounding for interpretivism. Here, an object is considered as a text and the explanations are anticipated by understanding the text as a whole and interpreting its parts (Myers, 1997), to determine the underlying meaning thereby bringing clarity to the phenomenon under enquiry. The analysis then becomes one of making sense to the whole only in relationship to its context and actors.

3.7. Data Collection

The foundation of any research study is its data that are the entities resulting from some experience, observation or experiment. In case of qualitative research, the required data is obtained from the four field based activities which are interviewing, observing, collecting and examining (materials), and feeling (Yin, 2011). The researcher employed these activities by imbibing the sources of evidence identified by Yin (2003) with regard to case study research which are documents, archival records, interviews, direct and non-participant observation and physical artefacts. The perspective of hermeneutics was followed to evaluate and corroborate the data obtained from these sources. The researcher also employed a wide range of PRA tools which includes daily routine, historical timeline, Venn

diagrams, mobility maps and the Do It Yourself (DIY) method. Following are the descriptions of the sources stated above.

3.7.1. Interviews

Interviews form the most important part of this study as they paved way for obtaining immense data on the research problem. The semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to have guided conversations with the identified respondents. It was an arduous task to gain access to the key persons involved in this project. It took around six months for the researcher to actually discover the Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala because the key informants were not affirmative on the presence of any ICT programmes existing in Kerala. Hence, the researcher had to visit and meet the officers of KSITM and KSWDC four times for finally demarcating the boundaries of the study to KITE. Interviews were held with ministers, local political leaders, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats at the state and district levels, elected representatives and officers of KM, KJM, KSITM and KSWDC.

Even though the study followed semi structured interviews, the researcher was not satisfied with the guided and constrained interaction. This made the researcher to follow Seidman (2006, p.p 95-111) whose book features a helpful chapter on “interviewing as a relationship”. Hence, the researcher adopted the idea of unscripted behaviour and demeanour for every interview. By following a conversational mode, the interviews itself led to a social relationship with the formation of an individualized relationship to every participant and groups. The duration and content of interviews varied primarily depending on the convenience of the respondents. The conduct of the interviews varied from semi structured to impromptu unscripted fashion especially during field visits to many individual enterprises, KSWDC and KSITM. Most of the formal interviews took an average of about 90 minutes where as some of them were done over a few minutes. Participants varied in their responses as some were candid at some points and others coy, but with the aim of understanding how participants construct meaning out of their activities, experiences and cognitive processes (Brenner, 2006) more important questions were made open rather than closed ended (Yin, 2011). To

corroborate the evidence and information gathered certain interviews with the project coordinators of KSITM, KSM and 16 executive members of Unnathi Consortium were held more than ones. Table 3.1 gives the details of the number of interviews conducted for the study.

Table 3.1 Number of interviews

No.	Group of people interviewed	Number
1.	Entrepreneurs	280
2.	Local political leaders	5
3.	Bureaucrats at the district level	14
4.	Bureaucrats at the state level	5
5.	KSITM coordinators	4
6.	KSWDC project coordinators	4
	Total	312

Appropriate strategies for conducting the interview was formulated using Yin's (2011) concept of conversation in qualitative interviewing. 'Learn from people' was the principle rather than studying them (Spradley, 1979). All the interviews were made in person and some of the follow up interviews were telephonic. To ensure effortless and relaxed discussions, none of the interviews were taped recorded as the presence of the device can alter the flow of interview. Instead case notes were prepared during and after each interview in order to identify the gaps and regroup the ideas emerging out of the interviews. This helped the researcher in describing, interpreting and understanding the subjective meanings of the social realities of these respondents. The explanations of these social facts was also a way to understand the hermeneutic circle by reflecting on the data as a whole and using it further to envisage the context.

3.7.2. Group Interview

Focus group interviewing is a widely accepted method used to gather some intricate, fundamental and hidden aspects of a group of individuals who share presumably some common experience or views. It was also carried out with the

belief that these respondents would readily express themselves more evidently when they part of the group. These discussions were very helpful as they could bring out the tensions and issues faced by these respondents. The group structure, individual links that are both overt and covert, hierarchy, rules, allocative resources authoritative resources, interactions, group solidarity and social capital were identified and understood basically through these discussions. The researcher moderated 15 focus group interviews consisting of 6-8 members. In one of the group discussion, the researcher had 72 respondents with 3 officials where problems were discussed and addressed to these officials. Group interviews took approximately 45 to 80 minutes.

3.7.3. Daily Routine

It reflects the kind of activities which one does on a daily basis (Mukherjee, 2003). It shows the time spent in different activities and indicates the size of the work involved. In this study, the researcher applied this method to understand the various actions in terms of its “length” and “breadth”, done by these respondents like feeding children, cooking, travelling, socializing and working. This is seen as an ethnomethodological tool by the researcher that was used to reflect on the way these women made sense out of their everyday world.

3.7.4. Historical Time Line

In this PRA method, the respondents narrated their life histories (Mukherjee, 2003). The respondents were facilitated to broadly connect the major events, changes experienced by them being part of KITEs. The researcher through this method tried to understand the prime modifications associated with the development of KITEs and how do the actors construct meanings out these phenomenon.

3.7.5. Venn Diagrams

This visual method is an essential way to understand the role of individuals/ institutions and the degree of their importance in decision making (Mukherjee, 2003). These diagrams consist of circles that represent individuals or institutions and its size shows the degree of their influence. If the circles overlap, it indicates the interactions between them and if these circles stay separate then it

means there are no contacts. This PRA method was used by the researcher to determine the awareness amongst the respondents regarding the hierarchy and communication patterns existing in the social structure of the field of study. It also identifies the degree of contact between the respondents and their parent organization.

3.7.6. Documents

Compilation and accumulation of objects especially documents, archival records and artefacts are the basic means for obtaining information that complement the study (Yin, 2011). A lot of written materials like formal reports and documents, pamphlets, newsletters, articles, websites, journals, news reports, minutes of meetings, official papers and notices, department publications, posters, photographs and archival records were collected. The contents and information of these written documents were reviewed many times before framing the questions for the interviews. The underlying information in these secondary sources were helpful as they could explain the entrepreneurial initiatives helping the researcher in making a healthy flow of conversation during interviews.

3.7.7. Direct Observation

It is the prime method used to understand and feel the social world of study. Through careful attention, it helps us to know our respondents in their social setting. Following Yin (2011), the relevant categories of which formed the part of systematic observation include the characteristics of people, including their dress and nonverbal behaviour, interactions between or among them, the “actions” taking place and the props (Murphy, 1980) associated with the enterprises or individuals. These observations helped to know their ease with the technology, geographic location, group dynamics, infrastructure facilities and the various problems associated with their working environment. All the 63 KITEs were visited for the observation of the setting which lasted for 6 hours for each enterprise. Moreover, the researcher also attended a feedback meeting of a project handled by these enterprises. It was a very important meeting as the researcher could observe the interactions between various actors including the officials, coordinators, beneficiaries. This meeting was also headed by the Executive Director of KSM. It

provided a substantial depth into the rules and resources upon which these enterprises worked and how services were provided to these KITEs.

3.7.8. Do It yourself (DIY)

As an outsider the researcher wanted to understand the technology and services adhered by the respondents for their survival. This PRA method gives a practical idea of the complexities involved in these activities (Mukherjee, 2003). This also helped the researcher to build a rapport with the respondents. It was an insight into the complexities associated with the works done by these members of KITEs.

3.8. Theoretical Framework

Actor Network Theory

ANT was pioneered by Michel Callon (1986) and Bruno Latour (1987). The fundamental argument is that knowledge is not an objective outcome of scientific processes but a social product or a consequence of heterogeneous network of actors (Law, 2008). It may be noted that ANT scholars have been focussing on technology and more specifically on ICT for quite some time (Latour, 1996). The theory provides a basis for analysing both social and technical, taken together. According to Walsham (1997), in the case of ICT, the actors would include software, hardware, people organisation and technical standards. It deals with the “mechanics of power” and is referred to as the sociology of translation (Law, 1992). Translation is a mechanism or process by which actors interact to build or change networks in such a way that certain actors are able to control others (Stanforth, 2006). Translation is attempted through four moments – problematisation, Interessement, enrolment and mobilisation of allies (Callon, 1986). Problematisation refers to the first moment of translation. In this, the focal actor having identified identities and interests of actors that are aligned with its own interests tries to establish an obligatory passage point (OPP) between the actors and the network with a view to making it indispensable (Ibid.). During Interessement the focal actor tries to lock others in by attempting to get them convinced about its definitions and then negotiating their details of involvement (Ibid.). During the third

moment of translation, the other actors in the network accept the interest defined for them by the focal actor (Ibid.). Mobilisation shows a set of methods used by the focal actor to ensure that the other actors do not betray the actions. It cannot be assured as a completed accomplishment, it may fail.

Functional simplification

It involves the demarcation of an operational domain within which the complexity of the world is reconstructed as a simplified set of causal or instrumental relations (Kallinikos, 2005). Functional simplification can reduce the complexity of the tasks associated with organisational routines. ICT not only simplifies the set of relations but also standardises and stabilises it (Gopakumar. 2014).

Trust

Trust has always been an important construct in social science. Literature on trust makes a distinction between “thick and thin trust” (Putnam, 2000) or between “characteristic based trust, process based trust and institutional based trust” (Zucker, 1986). Thick trust refers to trust generated in personal relations whereas thin trust shows professional or institutional relationships (Putnam, 2000). Characteristics based trust is centred on the characteristic of an individual, process based trust is on transactions and institutional based trust is on the nature of the institution (Zucker, 1986).

Neo-institutionalism

Over the past few decades sociological neo-institutionalism has become more prominent in social research. New institutionalism posits that institutions operate in an open environment consisting of other institutions. Every institution is influenced by the broader environment. In this environment, the main goal of organizations is to survive and gain legitimacy. In order to do so, they need to do more than succeed economically, they need to establish legitimacy within the world of institutions. An important contribution of new institutionalism was to add a cognitive type influence. This perspective adds that, instead of acting under rules or based on obligation, individuals act because of conceptions. "Compliance occurs in many circumstances because other types of behavior are inconceivable; routines

are followed because they are taken for granted as 'the way we do these things'" (Krucken, 2002).

Empowerment

Kabeer's definition is especially attractive because it contains two elements which help distinguish empowerment based on: 1) the idea of process, or change from a condition of disempowerment, and 2) that of human agency and choice, which she qualifies by saying that empowerment implies "choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives" and without "punishingly high costs" (Malhotra, 2002). The ability to exercise power can be explained in term of three inter-related dimensions:

Resources – Agency – Achievements

Resources in this sense are acquired through a multiplicity of social relations conducted in the various institutional domains which make up a society. They include not only access but also future claims to both material and human and social resources (Kabeer, 2000). Agency includes processes of decision making as well as less measurable manifestations like negotiation, deception and manipulation (Ibid). Resources and agency constitute what Sen (1985) refers to as capabilities. This signifies the potential that people have in living their lives in the way they want, by achieving valued ways of 'being and doing'. Achievement indicates the well-being or the outcome of the process (Kabeer, 2000).

3.9. The Role of Theory

This study has interweaved both inductive and deductive approach at different stages of fieldwork. During the initial stages, the researcher imbibed deductive approach to let concepts lead to the definition of the relevant data that was to be collected (Yin, 2011). After getting accustomed to the field setting, the researcher understood the presence of certain patterns in the social networks, actions and structures of these actors systematically leading to the emergence of concepts. Even though a lot of uncertainty was faced during the initial fieldwork, the researcher decided to collect data based on the existing concepts, rather than waiting for them to emerge. Yin points out that a broad theory can provide a

comprehensive research design which covers research questions, the linkage between data and propositions, unit of analysis, interpretation and analysis, etc. (Gopakumar, 2014). The concept of empowerment formulated in the study was designed using Kabeer's analysis on the process of empowerment. Indicators for defining empowerment based on the context of the study was constructed using secondary sources and through discussions with the experts. Pilot study was done to understand the applicability of the concepts and to check the verifiability of the indicators.

3.10. Coherence of the framework and summary

The theoretical framework of this study is built upon the conceptions on functional simplification, empowerment and translation. The analytical foundation used for comprehending the genesis of KITE is based on ANT or sociology of translation. Concepts were operationally defined using secondary sources and discussions with the field experts, grounded on the context of this study. The present study adopts explanatory embedded case design. Mixed method was employed which combines both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The research design as well as the methodological interpretations are consistent with the overall conceptual framework constructed of the study.

CHAPTER 4

THE GENESIS

4.1. Introduction

The practical approach of the State towards any developmental notion is linked directly to the significant structures involved. The State of Kerala has always been a forerunner in the adoption and application of ICT be it the service/support to its citizens or enabling smoother functioning of the business community. Many initiatives have been taken over the years which have enabled the State to be in the forefront than other States in implementing ICT projects and e-governance activities (Kuriyan et. al, 2006; Mitter, 2006; Nandi and Mukhophyay, 2007; Thomas and Parayil, 2008, Cordella and Hesse, 2010; Pillai and Shanta, 2011; S.B et. al, 2011). The 73rd and 74th amendments and enabling enactments in the State in 1994 led to decentralised planning with People's Plan Campaign and progressed with institutionalisation at different levels in Kerala (Planning commission, 2012). The urge for decentralization went beyond this. The aim was the establishment and institutionalisation of Local Self Government. Through focus group discussions, the researcher could understand that the State of Kerala seriously took up this task. Women's issues were highlighted and 'women's group' came in the forefront of the agenda. Shortly afterwards, Kudumbashree was launched in 1998 as a community network that would work in tandem with the local self-government for poverty eradication and women empowerment. The discretionary power of choice rested in the hands of these women for becoming a part of Kudumbashree also paves way for the better understanding of the effective functioning of decentralisation in Kerala. This system has encouraged experimentation and innovation, enabling good practices worthy of replication (Moolakkattu and Chathukulam, 2015). The field work and key informant, respondent interviews highlighted that different rungs of government work symbiotically in order to enhance women participation. This

mechanism of decentralisation in Kerala can also be the reason for efficiently resulting in improved opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Activities through community based organizations with the aim of empowerment of women were centred on community based service co-ordination, encouraging thrift and credits, and starting of micro-enterprises. A simple and practical way for identifying enterprises was devised; any idea that could solve a problem existing in the society (Problem Solving), fill the gap that existed (Gap Filling) or cater to new opportunity (Emerging Opportunities) was converted into an enterprise. The officials of the project have decided to tap the potential of the ICT for employment generation and poverty eradication. This was contrary to the opinion (or rather misconception) of the common people of Kerala and the political leadership, as they believed that the ICT is for the elite people and it can generate employment opportunities only to the highly educated people, well versed in computer programming (Prasad and Sreedevi, 2007). However, the Kudumbashree officials encouraged the poor educated women from the neighbourhood groups to set up micro-enterprises based on effective application of ICT. Deviating from the 'tried and tested' pattern so far followed by various government and private agencies for implementing self-employment schemes, promotion of innovative business ideas through micro-enterprises based on ICT were tested for the first time under the Kudumbashree project. However, this novel venture became one of Kudumbashree's most innovative aspect. This has been innovative in its instigation as very rarely has any attempt been made to enable poor women to make direct use of ICTs (Manoj, 2012). Heeks (2005) argued that these ICT consumption projects can generate jobs, incomes, skills, empowerment and gender equalities. All these cooperative enterprises are owned, managed and operated by women. Similar study was put forward by Rhodes (2009) which where micro enterprises were seen as an opportunity for providing gainful self-employment to the poor below the poverty line and thereby improving their income and living standards. Kudumbashree has a tie-up with the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII) to improve the performance of its micro enterprises.

The whole process of this innovative reformation of Government IT programme for women has been explained using the approach that studies power,

known as sociology of translation. Four ‘moments’ of translation are discerned below to describe the initiation of KITEs. Group interviews, key informant interviews, archival records, newsletters and annual reports were the prime sources of gathering data.

4.2. Genesis of Government IT programme for women

Translations are the product of continuous negotiations and not just the initial momentum provided at the point of origin (Alkrich and Latour, 1992). The moments of translation are the process of aligning the interest of the focal actor with the interest of the diverse set of actors (Callon, 1986). As discussed before, four moments of translation include Problematisation, Interessement, Enrollment and Mobilisation.

4.2.1. Problematisation

It is the first moment of translation and is described by Callon (1986) as “a system of alliances, or associations, between entities, thereby defining the identity and what they want.” In this phase of translation, the focal actor defines the identities and interests of other actors that are consistent with its own interests (Gopakumar, 2014). It renders itself indispensable through the negotiation of ‘obligatory passage point’ in the process of defining the nature of the problem and suggesting resolutions for it. As discussed before, it is the phase where the problem is contextualized. Participation of a number of actors is required to work through this process of problem resolving. In this case, the focal actor was KM.

Conceptualization of KITEs was the result of various social reforms and the resultant structural changes which were the aftermath of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 leading to decentralised planning. As a result, Panchayathi Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) obtained constitutional status as part of decentralisation. In Kerala, People’s Plan Campaign was launched by the LDF government on August 17, 1996 to institutionalize the process of decentralisation.

Women’s issues were highlighted and Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) came to the forefront as solutions for various problems faced by women in Kerala.

Shortly afterwards, Kudumbashree was launched on May 18, 1998 as a gender focussed programme for women to address the issues of poverty and empowerment. It worked in tandem with the Local Self Government institutions (LSGIs) for poverty eradication. With the formation of KM, various Government departments got symbiotically connected to enhance women participation at the grass root level. Efficient opportunities like thrift and credit, service-coordination and microenterprises or Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed through women community networks.

Microenterprises got shaped by the three factors identified by the authorities which were: problem solving, gap filling and emerging opportunity. Hence, Kudumbashree officials decided to tap the potential of ICT for employment generation and poverty eradication of women. This venture became Kudumbashree's most innovative aspect (Manoj and Siva Prakash, 2012). As discussed before, in Kerala, it was during the beginning of 1999 when the potential of IT to generate opportunities and employment was identified. This prospect of IT was also recognized by the officials of KM and they found an opportunity out of the problem faced by the local bodies. There was huge Government back log data to be digitized in 34 departments of the Government. Panchayath employees PF services credit card generation, Motor Vehicle Department's driving license, RC book entry, Civil Supplies Department's ration card data entry were some of the major future projects they wished to launch by the initiation of KITEs.

The problem context was put forward during a meeting held on August 15, 1999 where the Executive Director and Programme coordinators from KDM participated. Women became the target group as two widows came in search of employment at the KDM office in Thiruvananthapuram which propounded the idea of constructing a collective alliance of women in the form of KITEs. The process of data entry appeared functionally simplified, however ensuring the availability of data to be entered seemed like a complex process which required intermediation to assure the obtainability of data entry assignments. Location, infrastructure and funding were the factors to be covered before starting the programme.

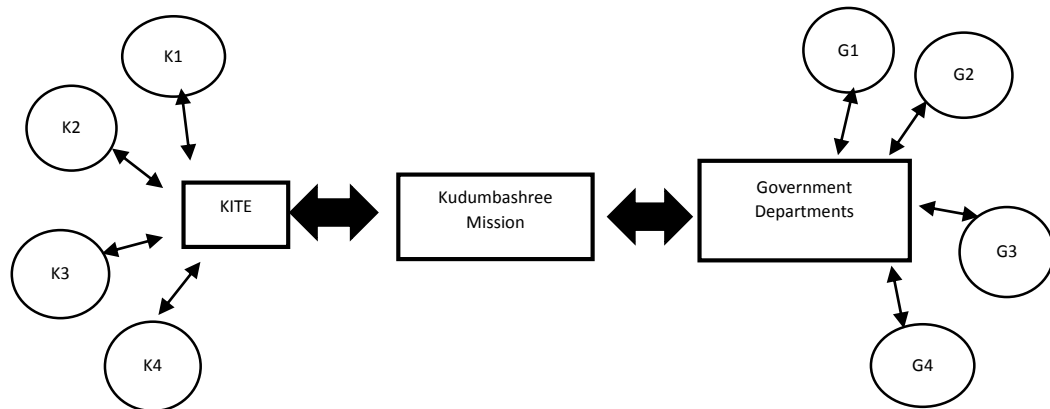


Figure 4.1. Working network of KM

The entrepreneurs were inspired by the new initiative which used ICT, a contemporary, complex and enthralling entity in those days, as a viable tool. They saw undertaking of government related transactions as a possibility to attain considerable respectability. The nature of these transactions also held an opportunity to continuously interact and network with the people as well as government officials. Moreover, the presence of a collective agency, a known location to work and the extreme support provided by the government, established self-assurance in their mind set which further enriched their motivation. The component of capital acquisition had a powerful impact on the organization of KITEs among women all over Kerala. It was this fact which supersedes all other factors that mobilized their participation into this new endeavour undertaken by KM.

Hence, KM, the focal actor, made itself indispensable and the problem was translated into an opportunity by institutionalising the mechanisation of data.

4.2.2. Interestement

It represents a series of processes by which the actors are locked in their proposed roles (Callon, 1986). Their commitment is reinforced by making sure that these actors do not come with any alternate appropriations. They must be motivated to consider the directions provided by the focal actor. Authorities of KM were very sceptical on the long term association of women in the form of IT enterprises. Another major issue that they feared was these women could start their individual

private ICT services or join other private agencies after acquiring the basic skills from the training provided by the focal actor. They could also leave the present job and go in search of other permanent employment. To effectively tackle this issue, the KM ensured the district coordinators and the entrepreneurs that all the units initiated before March 31, 2010 will be provided with the required tasks and assignments worth ₹ 10 lakhs without any hindrance. Through this strategy the focal actor was intending to expand the reach of KITEs. This information was spread systematically through CDS, COs, municipalities, grama sabhas and Panchayaths to finally reach the bottom of the structure – the NHGs.

Banks had apprehensions regarding the efficacy of KITEs and whether the entrepreneurs would make payment on time. KM took care of these apprehensions by persuading the bank officials and reassuring the monitoring role handled by them. Based on the mutual understanding between the officials of both sides, loans were approved from Syndicate bank in Thiruvananthapuram. The proposed project cost was ₹ 3 lakhs and ₹ 1 lakh was the subsidy sanctioned as a reward or support for instigating such a novel venture.

Through this process of intersement, the focal actor tries to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors defined through problematization. The inclinations of these entrepreneurs got focussed towards KITE by adopting a range of strategies and mechanisms in order to limit the impact of other entities towards these women. The whole process of creating an enterprise was made to look facile and uncomplicated, projecting a superficial image of permanent employment which led to mass acceptance of this programme.

The mechanisation of working environment also seemed appealing to these women entrepreneurs as the discourses during those days were mainly centred towards digitisation.

4.2.3. Enrollment

It represents the set of strategies and measures required to define the roles allocated to different actors (Callon, 1986). It is not necessary that the actual enrollment would necessarily result from the device of intersement. “No matter how convincing the argument, success is never assured” (Callon, 1986). Here, a

series of problematic questions are transformed into statements which are more certain and conclusive: KM will do the marketing and canvassing for KITEs; the essential qualification to join KITE is decided by the KM.

An important factor which allowed women to be enrolled into KITEs was their trust on KM. KM had already established itself as a comprehensive poverty alleviation programme which focussed primarily on micro-finance during the late 80s and early 90s (John, 2009). SHGs and NHGs were constructed among poor women as part of this endeavour to effectively converge resources and actions (Prabhu, 2014). This pre-established popularity also succoured wide acceptance for KITEs among the women folk.

In order to align these women into the associated assignments, strict instructions were provided by the focal actor. Attributes related to the roles were defined in terms of their age, essential skills and educational qualification. It was also required that these members or anyone belonging to their family should be enrolled in nearby NHG. Women below 35 years of age, having SSLC or above as educational qualification and skilled in typewriting were the pre-requisites identified for the members. Basic awareness and hands on experience of computer applications was also preferred. The raw data procured from Government departments or local bodies were collected and organized by the KM to make them error free. Forty nine applications were received from Thiruvananthapuram, where the attempt to create an IT programme for women first commenced. After screening these applications, ten women were selected by the focal actor.

Intressement achieves enrollment if it is successful (Callon, 1986). Through this phase of translation a script incorporating the various multilateral linkages was constructed for ensuring a typical example of micro-enterprise as it was the first of its kind.

4.2.4. Mobilisation

As Callon (1986) describes, the questions concerned with “who represents whom? And who speaks in the name of whom?” are to be answered for the programme to become successful. One of the most substantial requirement to begin

the functioning of KITEs was to bring together all the dispersed actors along the OPP to define and coordinate the roles assigned to them.

On September 15, 1999, Thiruvananthapuram saw the beginning of the first Government IT programme for women in Kerala. Inauguration was held in the presence of all the district KM coordinators, ten entrepreneurs, bureaucrats from government departments, Director and Executive Director and programme coordinators of KM. Mr V Sivankutty, the then Corporation Mayor inaugurated the first KITE, which was situated in the ground floor of KDM office, Thiruvananthapuram. It started working with ten entrepreneurs, 5 computers and a 3 kg UPS supported with very basic infrastructure. Works were handled on the basis of shifts from 8 am to 2 pm and 2 pm to 6 or 8 pm which was dependable on the amount of data to be entered. A software team was also recruited by the focal actor to design and construct the required data entry software associated with each work.

KM used the cascade effect to brief the information to a greater population. Follow up meetings were organized and this resulted in the formation of 47 KITEs within the span of one year. The tasks were standardised and incorporated into the structure of the focal actor. KM became the spokesperson for the whole of KITE which had its own individual group leaders for each enterprise. The KM authorities were still doubtful on the future of these enterprises as they were completely dependent on the focal actor with regard to the software and hardware aspects of the whole transactions. Hence, three categories of KITEs were formed to enhance their coherence and self – dependence. They are listed below:

1. Consulting enterprises

These IT enterprises provide ICT related support activities like computer and software training, consultancy and other services.

2. Processing enterprises

These units use ICT as a primary, processing technology. They provide data entry services, ICT based business services, software customisation. They create local digital content for public sector organisations.

3. Hardware assembling enterprises

They produce ICTs as an enterprise output. They assemble hardware and produce hardware, software, telecommunication products (Duncombe et.al, 2005)

Apart from the above discussed constructions, later on January 17, 2012, a consortium called Unnathi Society of IT Enterprises was inaugurated by Dr. M K Muneer, former minister for Panchayaths and Social Welfare, headquartered at Thrissur, a central district in Kerala state. Through the formation of this agency the focal actor intended to mobilise the whole IT division under a single entity having its own spokesperson. The objective was to exclusively deal with big data entry assignments that required pan Kerala presence mainly that of government departments, Private and Public sector banks, IT companies etc. It led to a hierarchical arrangement where the executive members from KITEs would divide and assign the work between the participating enterprises, monitor the quality and timeliness of execution, take corrective measures as and when required, deliver the output to the clients and ensure collection and disbursement of money (Unnathi, 2014).

The above descriptions and the related analysis clearly indicates a twofold advantage of constructing such IT enabled enterprises. The government benefitted out of this venture as it was the most functionally simplified manner of arranging, organizing and digitizing such old documents. This entry was done in the local language Malayalam at a very cheap rate (₹ 2 per document). If these assignments were given to other private agencies like Technopark, then it would take a huge amount as remuneration for these entries. In simple terms, the enormous government files were getting both organized and digitized. This supports the argument by Cordella and Tempini (2011) on the possibility of automation which increased the effectiveness and efficiency associated with tasks handled by bureaucrats. ICT was institutionalised through the innovative attempt by the government to seize the opportunity and undertake the construction of enterprises.

We shall also look at other scenarios which describes the characteristics of these entrepreneurs quantitatively represented in the form socio-economic profile

using charts and tables. Before going into these details, it is essential to know the present number of KITEs in Kerala to understand the strength of these enterprises.

Table 4.1. District wise distribution of KITEs

No.	District	No. of KITEs
1.	Kasargode	2
2.	Wayanad	2
3.	Kannur	7
4.	Kozhikode	3
5.	Malappuram	6
6.	Trichur	6
7.	Palakkad	5
8.	Ernakulam	9
9.	Kottayam	4
10.	Idukki	4
11.	Alappuzha	3
12.	Pathanamthitta	1
13.	Kollam	5
14.	Thiruvananthapuram	6
	Total	63

Source: Field work

The above table shows the district wise break up of Kudumbashree IT units. Through the table it is clear that maximum number of units are functioning in Ernakulam, Malappuram, Thiruvananthapuram (the capital city of Kerala), and Kannur districts whereas minimum number of units are in Pathanamthitta, Wayanad and Kasargode district.

4.3. Demographic representation

The researcher has also demonstrated the contemporary demographic representation of KITEs to vividly elucidate the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the sample. Such explanations help to uncover the unique and shared features of the women entrepreneurs who are a productive part of KITEs. It

became helpful in identifying the significant factors that have influenced them to be an entrepreneur. Thus socio-economic background of an individual is crucial in the sense that it not only precedes them but indeed constitutes them. Socio-economic background also reflects the different positions individuals have in society. Following are the details of the respondents of KITEs:

- Age
- Religion
- Caste
- Marital Status
- Number of family members
- Educational qualification of the member
- Educational qualification of husband/father
- Monthly income through IT unit
- Total monthly income of family
- Occupation of husband/father
- Type of family

Information was gathered from the 63 Kudumbashree IT enterprises across the 14 districts of Kerala. 280 respondents who are the members of Kudumbashree IT enterprises having more than ten years of experience formed the sample of this study. The researcher has provided a detailed description of each entity along with diagrams.

4.3.1. Age

The stratification based on age is an important determinant showing the class of workers who form the group. As this study was amongst women, the factor of age could illuminate the gravity of their functions and the associated roles played by them at certain stages. Though the sample of this study were women who had more than ten years of experience, the researcher found that most of the respondents belonging to these enterprises are part of this Government IT project since its establishment. 71.79 percent of the respondents belonged to the age group of 31-40 and 18.57 percent belong to the age group of 41-50. Another 9.64 per cent belonged

to the age group of 20-30 years. The Figure 4.2 below represents the division of women respondents based on age.

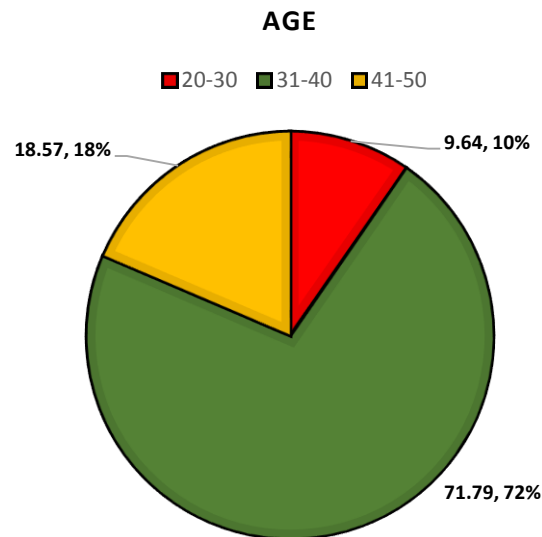


Figure 4.2. Overall distribution based on Age

It can be understood from the above data that this group is dominated by women who belong to the age group of 31-40 years. Most of the studies done amongst women entrepreneurs proves the presence of this age group (Prabhu, 2015; Yogesh, 2015). These are the group of women who have to play a number of gender roles including socialization of the young, and the stabilization of adult personalities (Haralambos and Heald, 2011). This social group has maintained to stabilize their participation by forming the fundamental structure of KITEs from its initial stage. It is this fundamental structure that represents the collective identity of these women. Through focus group discussions, it was identified that they reproduced this collective identity everyday by sustaining their presence in the group. All of them joined KITEs and according to Super's developmental self - concept theory, it is the age where people explore, establish and settle down with their vocational preferences. Another reason is that they dislike confining themselves inside the four walls of the household and seek to work and earn money by entering into the labour market. As most of them were married women with school going children, they preferred working under flexible working conditions for the ease of their domestic chores. They found less number of opportunities available for them at this age and they were willing to work hard to sustain their

livelihood (Sreeram et.al, 2015). Another fact identified is that the participation of young women was comparatively very low because of lack of interest, influence or control of their family members and availability of other employment opportunities. There was no one more than 50 years of age because of unhealthy conditions, problems of physical immobility and lack of interest.

4.3.2. Religion

Different religious communities present in Indian society have their own social and collective religious faiths, morals, socio-cultural norms and values. Because of such cultural pluralism, women belonging to different communities differ in their social outlook and behavioural pattern. The women of different religious groups possess different kind of positions in their family and society. Religion not only demarcates the responsibilities, but also exercises a determining influence on the attitude of men towards their women folk (Gautham, 2008). This study has also looked into the religious factors to understand its functional and collective aspects on the respondents of KITEs.

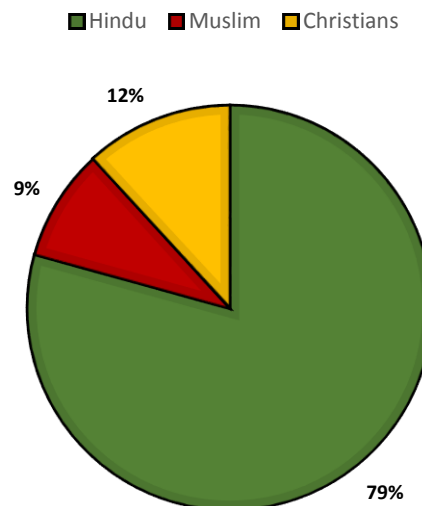


Figure 4.3. Overall distribution based on Religion

The Figure 4.3 shows the overall religion wise distribution of the respondents based on the data collected. The above figure clearly depicts that the religious majority is with the Hindus i.e. more than half (79 percent) of the sample were women belonging to the Hindu community. Another 12 percent belongs to the

Christian community and the rest, 9 percent is covered by the Muslim community. The dominant representation of Hindu community is only a replication of the higher proportion of Hindus in the Kerala society. The social control over Muslim women due to the normative ideologies leading to further control on their mobility and freedom of choice has led to limited participation from their part. More number of Muslim women participation was found in north Kerala because of their prominence in the Malappuram district. This district is known for the presence of maximum number of Muslim population in overall Kerala. And Malappuram was declared as the first e- district in Kerala during the year 2003-2005. It was the after effect of Akshaya project, which started as a pilot project in Malappuram for extending the benefits of ICTs to all people (Krishnan, 2015; Kiran, 2014; Nissar and Yakoob, 2014; Bannerji and Premanandan, 2012; Cordella and Hesse, 2010; Neelamalar and Kuttan, 2008; Pal, 2007; Nandi and Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Still there was huge inhibition experienced by women belonging to this Muslim community due to the institutional and structural barriers faced by them. Central Kerala includes the districts of Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam or Kochi, Idukki and Kottayam. Ernakulam, which is the commercial capital of Kerala has the maximum number of 8 Kudumbashree IT units in the overall state. Thiruvananthapuram is the capital city of Kerala state and it is the district where the Government led to the structural formation of KITEs as described above, for the first time in the year 1999 as an aftermath of decentralisation process. There are only 15 IT enterprises in the southern region of Kerala with the maximum number of 6 in Thiruvananthapuram district and minimum of 1 unit in Pathanamthitta district.

The large ratio of Hindu community in the workforce of Kudumbashree IT enterprise is an indicative or replication of their strength in the whole population of Kerala state. Muslim women are less in number due to the several discriminations faced by them as part of their normative system and the social control imposed on them. All the Muslim respondents were married during their young age. They were ascribed to confirm to the societal norms and values which disregards the freedom to choose any employment for women.

4.3.3. Caste

The social stratification based on caste is a particular form of social inequality where the social groups are ranked one after the other, usually in terms of amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess (Haralambos and Heald, 2011). Indian Society is dominated by this patterned differentiation and its influence on rural society is well marked. Members of a particular stratum have common identity and common interests. Caste plays a significant role in moulding the emergence of leadership at village level. The fundamental system associated with the caste system in India is the ascribed form of status and hierarchy. Caste is still a hereditary endogamous and localized group having some sort of traditional association with an occupation and a particular position on the local hierarchy of castes (Sinha, 2004).

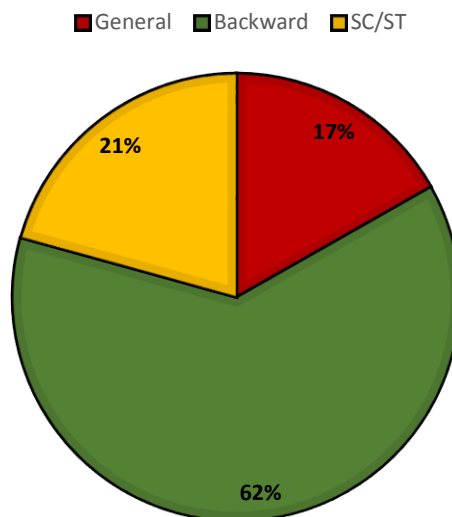


Figure 4.4. Overall distribution based on Caste

The Figure 4.4 represents the classification of respondents from KITEs based on their caste. The data shows that more than half of the respondents i.e. 62.5 per cent belonged to the backward caste, 16.79 per cent belonged to the general category and remaining 20.71 per cent belonged to the SC/ST community. This shows that women from backward caste and from minority groups were given prime significance while forming the structural base of enterprises. As Kudumbashree is a poverty eradication agency for uplifting women from the

oppressed section of Kerala society, there is very much possibility of the presence of members from backward and minority community.

4.3.4. Marital status

Marriage is the basis for the institution of family. Marital status of a woman in our society is an important determinant factor for women. Generally, women are bounded with lot of cultural barriers and moral responsibilities. Married women are obliged to perform various roles and associated responsibilities as wife, mother, and daughter - in - law etc. These roles and duties come with related rules, resources and limitations. The Figure 4.5 below shows the classification based on married status of the women respondents.

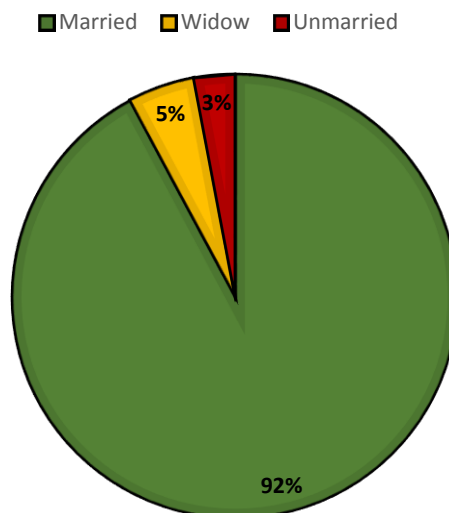


Figure 4.5. Overall distribution based on marital status

In the present study, 92 percent of the respondents were married. This indicates that the normative structure of the family system in Kerala supports the changing status of women in an upcoming industrial society like Kerala. The social control that they could have faced was less may be because they were employed in a refined version of ‘women’s job’ with a homogenous group. Also the reason for these respondents to take up this employment could be that they had flexible working hours which supported their ‘mother –homemaker role’. Another reason identified was that these women entered the labour market to supplement family income and also to lead a compatible working condition.

A very few respondents were widows (5 percent) and unmarried (3 percent). This could be an indicative of the social control imposed on them because of the normative ideologies followed in the society. Due to the traditionally organized cultural outlook of women in our society, it is difficult for such women to exercise their freedom of choice. They might be afraid of gossips and rumours. Hence, it is made instrumental by the family members to restrict the contribution of these women by controlling their social mobility, human capital and social capital.

4.3.5. Educational Qualification of respondents

Education is an important variable while analysing the empowerment of women. As explained by Durkheim, it is the medium by which the society transfers its norms to the individuals. It also helps people to develop their skills and enhance their opportunity in the labour market. To withstand the socio-cultural barriers of society, it is an essential requirement for women to educate themselves and become literate. It helps them to communicate their ideas to the people effectively. Kerala state has achieved a human development index comparable to the developed countries of the World. Prof. Amartya Sen has attributed these achievements largely to the priority which the state has accorded to high literacy among all Indian states and education for a long time. (General Education Department, 2014). Kerala is equipped with several plans and programmes to facilitate literacy to the grass root level. According to the census data (2011), the literacy rate in Kerala is 94 percent, the highest in whole India. Female literacy rate was found to be 92.07 percent which depicts the awareness amongst women with regard to education. Many factors contribute to entrepreneurial success, but education is a prime determinant of entrepreneur outcome. If education leads to a higher quality of entrepreneurial performance, investment in the education of (prospective) entrepreneurs is justified (Van Der Sluis et.al, 2008). There can be a significant rise in the human capital of individuals who are effectively exposed to skill development programmes. Majority of the respondents i.e., 33.21 percent were women who had completed degree as their qualification, 47.86 percent had pre-degree (PDC) or +2 as their basic qualification and 22.14 percent women were SSLC or 10th qualified. It was astounding to find a very few yet a powerful group of women who has post-

graduation as their qualification. Along with more than minimum education, most of them were already e-literate.

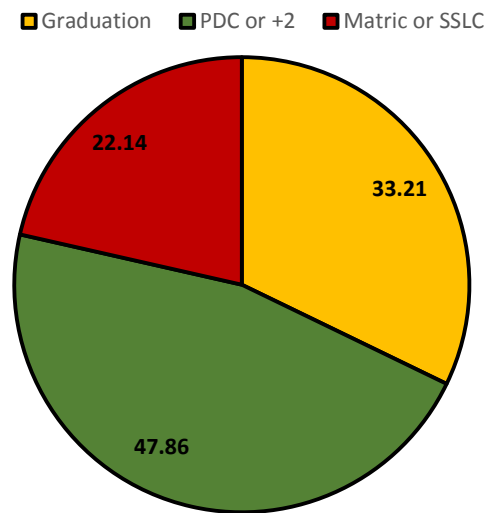


Figure 4.6. Overall distribution based on Educational qualification

These women were also trained by Kudumbashree Mission in enhancing their technical skills. This is very indicative of the fact that women in Kerala are literate and have amazing educational credits. Davidsson and Honig (2003) argue that education provides individuals with increases in their cognitive abilities and is therefore positively associated with entrepreneurial discovery. Education brings about behavioural changes in an individual, contributes to his self-development, change his knowledge about the ‘unknown so far’ areas and motivates him to try the untried ideas, which is essentially contributing to the entrepreneurial behaviour (Sreeram et. al, 2015). Both Gimeno et al. (1997) and Le (1999) argue that education may lead to skills that are useful for both entrepreneurs and wage earners.

4.3.6. Monthly Income of the respondents

The KM started this programme intending to provide minimum of ₹ 1500 as monthly income for these women entrepreneurs (Unnathi, 2013). But later it was realized by the entrepreneurs that there is no fixed monthly income that can be expected from the works attained on contractual basis. It is the dependence on contract labour that forces them to work for months in order to get their wage. But through discussions it was understood that on an average each worker obtains ₹ 2000 - ₹ 5000 as monthly income. The respondents were not satisfied with their

economic situation. It was basically due to the lack of support from the KM in providing enough work for them which deviated from the pattern of work usually followed before 2012, i.e before the beginning of Unnathi Society for IT Enterprises. After these enterprises were set free to sustain themselves, most of the enterprises went into a highly precarious situation. But it was also visible that those persons who are completely dependent on this form of income are satisfied with this output because of the availability of the income to fulfil their basic needs and the respondents from well off family consider this wage as an extra income for the family.

4.3.7. Educational qualification of husband / father

Considering the perspective of autonomy, educational qualification of family members profoundly influences the freedom of women. The task of education is to 'bring out' (Usher and Edwards, 1994), to help realize the potentials so that they become capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency. Within modernity, it is the key to developing individuals and hence making social progress possible. The shared values and social solidarity can enhance the understanding and social exposure of people by shrinking the restrictions and barriers imposed against women by traditions. It was found that majority of husbands / father had SSLC (41.79 percent) as their educational qualification, 31.78 percent had degree, 18.21 percent were found to be having qualification below SSLC and the remaining (8.21 percent) had PDC/+2 as their basic educational qualification.

4.3.8. Total Monthly Income of the Family

Income of a family defines its access to basic needs such as health care, education, social housing, transport and benefit system. It also depicts the fundamental reasons for the present existence of women in the developmental policies of the Government. It was difficult of the researcher to obtain data on the same as most of the respondents were reluctant to share information regarding their economic status. Here, most of the respondents (52.14 percent) belonged to the group of family who have monthly income above ₹ 10,000. 28.93 percent were in the category of ₹ 5000- ₹ 10,000 and the rest 18.93 percent had family income

below ₹ 5000. The data clearly shows that more than half of the respondents are comfortable with their financial background. They were keen in supporting their family with extra income and also to become financially independent by working under a flexible environment in order to fulfil their dual responsibility. Usually many studies have shown that women participate in self-help groups like Kudumbashree because of lack of family income but in this study the researcher could understand that most of them are continuing their participation as the wage they obtain through the work acts as an extra income for themselves and their family.

4.3.9. Occupation of Father/ Husband

Work holds the key to human happiness and fulfilment. It can provide the means either to fulfil man's potential or to distort and pervert his nature and his relationships with others (Haralambos and Heald, 2011). The social system prevalent in our society stratifies social actors in terms of their product of labour. It is essential to understand the economic capabilities of the respondent's guardian to know the instrument of control faced by these women. From the information gathered it was identified that 49.29 percent of husband /father were involved in business/ self-employment whereas 33.93 percent of them were daily wage labourers or workers in private companies. The rest of them (16.79 percent) were employed in public sector as government employee.

4.3.10. Type of family

The social structure of any society has family as its basic unit. Murdock defines the family as follows, "the family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction". It forms the network of social relationships through which functional aspects of society are fulfilled by imposing social solidarity. Families assume diverse forms and functions from one country to another, and within each national society. These express the diversity of individual preference and societal conditions, but everywhere it provides the natural framework for the emotional, financial and material support essential for the development of its members. In the present study, 66.07 per cent of the respondents had a nuclear family structure and the rest of them (31.1percent) were part of the

extended family. A very few (2.83 percent) of them belonged to joint family and amongst them majority belonged to Muslim community. Here, the data is skewed towards nuclear family structure which is the result of changing social relations and structures. This change could also be attributed to the rising influence of modernization, westernization and other related processes. Restrictions and control on women by the family members in the extended and joint families are higher than the nuclear families. But it should also be noted that the support of family members to share the family and domestic responsibilities are higher in extended family. A study by Singh (1975) observed that the establishment of nuclear families is a result of women's employment which creates women friendly environment where they have greater chances for exercising their will power. But the joint families restrict the freedom of women with regard to movement outside home, decision-making in financial matters or running the household.

4.4. Conclusion

The fact of giving more thrust on technological programmes and services can be described as the foundational build-up of techno-culture in Kerala. According to Kellner (1989), it represents the configuration of mass culture and the consumer society in which consumer goods, television, mass images and computerized information become dominant form of culture in developed world and increasingly penetrate developing countries as well. The rising discourse on information technology envisages that the ability to use and adapt to information technology is the critical factor in generating and accessing wealth, power and knowledge (Castells, 2010).

New gender specific ICT interventions have been introduced in Kerala State like the first of its kind public private partnership social enterprise to develop a network of trained women entrepreneurs. The project named as 'Sandesh One' was launched by Chief Minister Shri Oommen Chandy on January 12, 2015. It will be a network of 1000-plus women to generate mass employment at the grassroots level by promoting various micro-enterprises. It is an idea conceived by the Kerala State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC), an organisation under Kerala's Department of Social (The Hindu, 2015). Hence, in this chapter, the

researcher discussed the structural and functional aspects of the basic agencies that devise the ICT programmes and schemes in Kerala using the sociology of translation. Presence of only one gender specific programme, currently in the functioning stage also shows the ignorance of Government planning agencies. Kudumbashree ICT enterprises initiated for the empowerment of women through ICT will be further cognized in the coming chapters.

CHAPTER 5

CONSTRAINING AND LIBERATING FACTORS

5.1. Introduction

The process of empowerment experienced by these women was also accompanied by their ability to tackle both the benefits and drawbacks associated with KITEs. In this chapter, the researcher has delineated the constraining and liberating factors encountered by the women entrepreneurs. It was a necessity to understand such aspects of KITEs because only then, it will be possible to construct and comprehend the social system of the respondents.

It took a lot of time for the researcher to unravel some of these factors as the respondents themselves were unconscious regarding its presence. In such cases, the researcher employed focus group discussions and certain PRA tools like daily routine analysis and Venn diagrams.

The chapter first discusses the constraining factors followed by liberating factors. The researcher has also provided some responses from the women entrepreneurs which seemed overt reactions for the questions asked.

5.2. Constraining factors

In this study, it represents the factors that limit or restrict the act of production or interrupt the process of production in the form of structural barriers and individual deficiencies thereby affecting the social system of the actors. In this study, it was essential to understand the circumstances that would obstruct the potentiality of the group of women entrepreneurs belonging to KITEs. Bruin et.al (2007) found that labor market institutions or the roles society ascribes to women, can cause difficulties for female entrepreneurs in growing their business.

Though it seemed facile or simplistic in the beginning but it was only during the second stage of the field work when the researcher could penetrate into

the undefined, vague restraints which curbed the working environment of these women entrepreneurs. In some of the case, these women entrepreneurs were themselves ignorant about the existing factors which constrained them.

Most of the information on these factors were discovered mainly through group discussions. The researcher has also employed semi-structured interviews, observations and individual discussions to unveil the major constraining factors affecting them. Key informant interviews were also helpful in exposing certain factors which remained latent from the perspective of the group. The data obtained through these interviews facilitated the researcher in the process of tethering the obtained abstractions which paved way for the better understanding of their social system. The Figure 5.1 below, showcases the constraining factors experienced by these women entrepreneurs as part of their participation in KITEs.

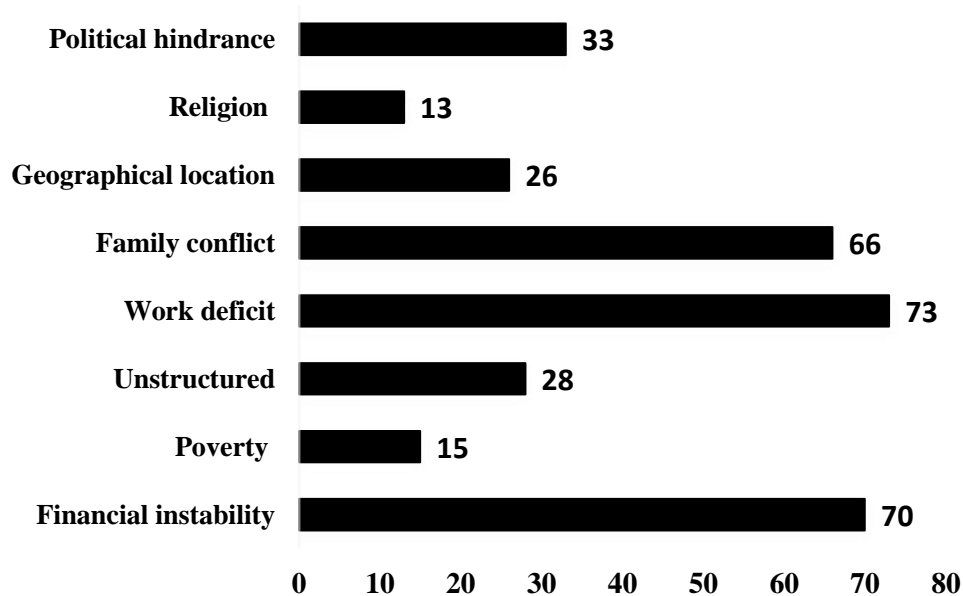


Figure 5.1. Percentage distribution of Constraining factors

All these factors have been explained below by the researcher with examples obtained through the field work.

5.2.1. Work deficit

Almost all the IT units identified their inability to obtain adequate work for their survival as the prime constraining factor. This was even recognized as the major cause for the destruction of most of the KITEs. Through the field work, the

researcher found that around 73 percent of the respondents considered the lack of data entry tasks as the main reason which hindered the commodity production. In this case, the commodities refer to the digitized data formed through the data entry process of these women entrepreneurs. It was required to discover the chief cause that generated such a problem which restrained the production process of this group. Intense analysis and data collection was required to reveal these aspects associated with KITEs. The researcher realized that semi-structured interviews were not enough to answer these questions and hence, the major portion of the information related to this particular aspect was obtained through focus group discussions. Information regarding the structural ailments were identified from the key informants. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, it was during the year 2006, when the Hardware units, Vidyashree and Data entry units saw an upward movement and rose to the maximum of 254 units in total. Vidyashree IT unit members who were working in the Government initiated IT@school project were asked to withdraw from the same project due to the termination of their bond which was meant for five years. But some of these Vidyashree IT units managed to continue as data entry units escalating the expansion of KITEs to the number of 101 units in total. Soon after 2007, certain administrative and structural issues led to the obliteration of most of the units. And its impact led to the foundation of an inconsistent mode of production. As a solution to this problem, a consortium of these IT units was formed on January 17, 2012 and named as *Unnathi*. It was concerned with upgrading the IT infrastructure and skills of these women entrepreneurs by aiding expert advice to them. For this purpose, certain professionals or persons specialized in similar field were employed by the consortium. They were also meant to campaign for KITEs and were supposed to provide technical expertise to these women entrepreneurs. But the researcher through the discussions could understand that the specified duties were not handled by these professionals due to the lack of continuous monitoring from the KM. One of the women entrepreneur from a well – established KITE in Kottayam stated while interviewing:

“During the initial years, we got lot of support from the authorities of KM. They were keen in ensuring that we receive continuous data entry works every month. They even gathered us for official meetings and sometimes made a visit to our units to monitor the

working environment. They even enquired our needs and demands which made us feel very secure. But later on, such a responsibility is lagging amongst the authorities. Now, we ourselves manage to occupy our jobs which has helped us to sustain each of our livelihoods. It was mainly after the formation of the consortium, which hindered the availability of works for some of the units in Kerala.”

According to these women entrepreneurs, it was the lack of attention and dedication from the authorities which affected their commodity production and labour value. The above stated finding was affirmatively accepted by almost all the women entrepreneurs. It was in a study by Duncombe et.al (2005) where similar problem was identified but other studies from Prasad and Sreedevi (2007) and Arun et.al (2004) did not mention this hurdle in their article. Another issue which led to work deficit was the computerisation of several Government departments which caused huge reduction in the availability of raw data for them to digitize. Also, they were not highly efficient to compete with the private sector where exclusive works on web designing and colour printing was handled. Duncombe et.al (2005) discussed this as a major hindrance in the path of KITEs. Such a development of private sector specialised services added to the already existing competition where these women in a disadvantageous position. Now, this continuous disruption in the production process led to the obstruction of the flow of capital in the form of wages leading to the emergence of another set of constraining facts which will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.2. Financial instability

From the beginning onwards, the researcher observed that it was the financial need which was overriding almost all other needs. Hence, apart from the shortage in data entry assignments, the prime concern associated with these women was the rising insecurity and uncertainty linked to capital accumulation. Even though this problem was the concomitant of work deficit but there were certain other issues identified by the researcher during the interviews. For the purpose of starting an enterprise, these women were supported by the government initially and these supports were mainly in the form of loans, infrastructure, market and consultancy. A subsidy of ₹ 1 lakh was sanctioned as reward to motivate them and the rest of the amount had to be raised by these women as a group. The proposed

project cost was ₹ 3 lakh, therefore, around ₹ 2.5 lakh was taken as loan from banks which was easily made available to them under the assurance of KM. This was finding was verified from the article of Arun et.al (2004), through which the researcher could understand that these enterprise obtained significant degree of institutional support from government departments, banks, other financial intermediaries, and local organisations. From the interviews and group discussions, it was discovered that these loans were lent out to them by mortgaging the subject's assets or property which were mostly gold ornaments followed by land and in some cases even house. The discussions also unveiled that at present, all the 63 KITEs had repaid their loans where as those units which struggled from the beginning onwards had closed down their units. A sheer determination was observed in their discussions through the conversation analysis as most of the women entrepreneurs were assertive in making sure that they pay back such debts. Along with this financial responsibility, they were also supposed to pay their phone bills, electricity bills, internet bills and room rent etc. The payments were made by the Government departments after the completion of the work.

Initially, these women received a specific portion of the payment as advance but such a system was ceased by the KM after some years. It was mainly after 2007, when a drastic drop of these IT units were observed due to immense delay in payments and data entry works. It was during this period when they got reduced to 68 from 101 in numbers. From the field work, it was found that these women entrepreneurs were “free proprietors” of their own labour and hence, they had to use a part of their wage to maintain unobstructed production of digitized form of data. But through the various discussions and interviews, it was very evident that the freedom to sell their own labour was only in appearance. In reality, they were forced to sell because they could not exist without selling their labour power. They also lacked any access to the relations of production and could not sell products without the intervention of KM. The researcher through various conversations with these women entrepreneurs could also ascertain that they could not exist without selling their labour power as they voluntarily dragged themselves into debt unaware of its consequences. Around 70 percent of the women entrepreneurs found financial instability as a major problem faced by them. A

women entrepreneur Sujatha from a KITE in Malappuram discussed her apprehensions related to the future financial state of her own unit:

“We paid our loan as soon as the revenue came in because we were highly determined to close our debt. Initially, we received enough financial support in the form of payments but during the later stage, the pre-arranged system was interrupted due to certain structural reasons. The already existing officials who instituted this venture with us were replaced with new ones. Now, the payments are not regular and we face a lot of delays on acquiring constant flow of income to pay our monthly bills.”

But the researcher was curious to understand the real cause behind such an immense cluster of problems associated with financial instability. Through the discussions, it was very evident that these two problems could be intricately connected and they together formed a vicious circle. To analyse such a situation, the researcher has also collected additional information on these problems from the authorities of KM. Through the key informant interviews and discussions, the researcher could discover that the core cause behind the above stated problem was the label of unskilled labour linked to these women entrepreneurs. They were hampered by the limited skill set and had no prior experience with the IT occupational environment when compared to highly thorough and efficient professional employees of IT sector. According to key informants it was this factor which hampered their customer base and the lack of professionalism added to the already existing set of drawbacks. The researcher could also observe from the field that for the faster completion of data entry tasks, these women entrepreneurs recruited college students. These experienced IT work force were especially females to maintain a comfortable environment in the enterprise. But such a practice again caused more disorder as these new labourers were to be paid regularly and despite leading an inconsistent financial condition, these women entrepreneurs managed to provide income for them. Therefore, it can be said that these three problems are interconnected and it was understood that it was the label of unskilled labour attached to them which led to the inception of work deficit, which in turn caused financial instability. Due to financial problems, they could not upgrade their infrastructure and technical tools like computers, software, printers etc. which

hindered their process of production. Another problem faced by these women entrepreneurs was family conflict which is discussed in the upcoming section.

5.2.3. Family conflict

In this study, the findings related to this particular factor depicts the reinforced social, political and material inequality faced by women constituted by the difference in power. The information obtained through women entrepreneurs draw attention on the underlying and encompassing structures of gender. Major issues arise when these women deviate from the already existing traditional roles and responsibilities assigned to them by the societal arrangement. Approximately 66 percent of the respondents disclosed that they faced certain hurdles in balancing their work with the family role. The researcher has used daily routine analysis to probe into the life world of these women entrepreneurs. The Figure 5.2 below shows the daily routine analysis of a women entrepreneur during normal work load, from an average performing KITE of Palakkad district.

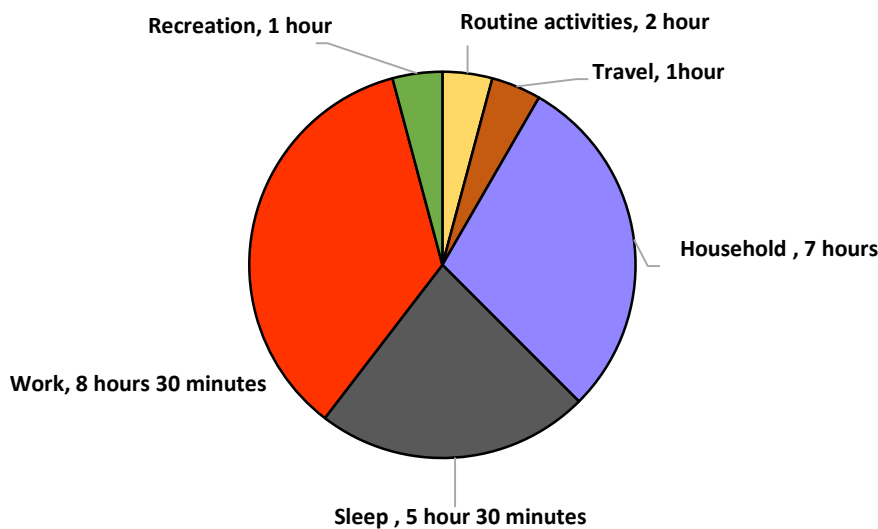


Figure 5.2. Daily routine analysis during normal work load

The respondent was purposefully selected because of the undisguised, explicit and clear responses obtained from this particular entrepreneur. She was very candid in explaining the problems related to the role conflict experienced not only by her but other entrepreneurs as well. While interviewing her, it was very helpful for the researcher to know the family life of an average women entrepreneur belonging to KITE. Daily routine of the same women entrepreneur during normal

and heavy work load was analysed to identify the difference. The Figure 5.3 below shows the daily routine of a women entrepreneur during heavy work load.

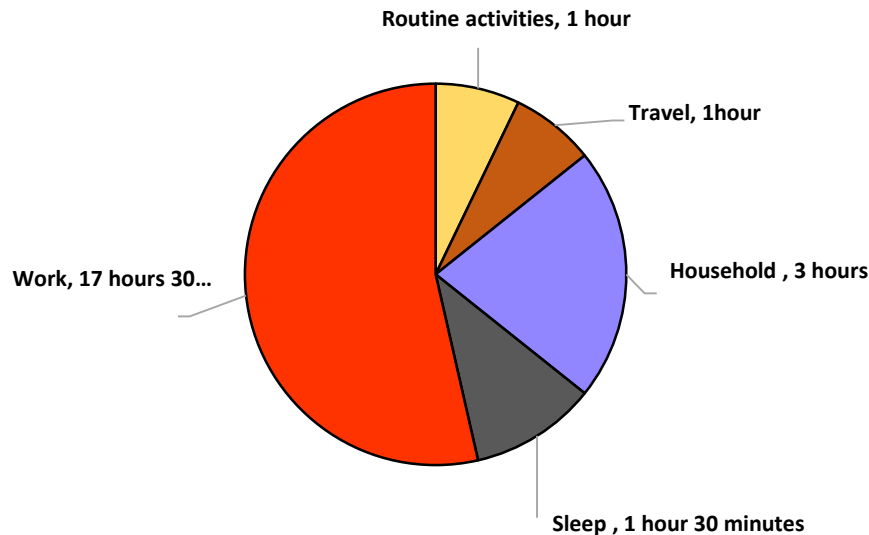


Figure 5.3. Daily routine analysis during heavy work load

When both the daily routines were analysed, it became visible that the time spent for household works gets reduced to approximately 3 hours from 7 hours during heavy work load because the respondent was forced to do data entry work for more than 12 hours. It is this surplus labour time expended by the entrepreneurs, which leads to conflict. The woman said:

“Our works are time bound and hence, we are forced to complete the given task within the specified time. We overwork for more than 12 hours, sometimes without sleeping at night to finish the data entry. Most of us stay at the enterprise office to make sure that we provide thorough attention to the work and not to household matters. In those days. I leave my children to my parents or in-laws because if I go home, then, by default, I will be pushed into household activities. It does cause conflict but we all have learned to manage it.”

The data also shows that during normal work load, they used to work for 8 hours but when they are forced to finish the task, it gets raised to approximately 17 hours which is a huge struggle experienced by these women entrepreneurs. Through the field work, the researcher could understand that these women are not paid immediately after the completion of the task and during some cases it takes

more than 2 years for the authorities to provide remuneration for the finished data entry work. The woman also stated:

“It won’t become a struggle for us if we were paid regularly. The authorities sometimes take more than a year to pay the work completed. We sit day and night to do the work and they again make us do the same by delaying the payment. This delay causes a lot of trouble for us as we might have to pay the rent of the extra computer systems hired for the fast completion of the task. Such setback provokes even our family members to question our participation as an entrepreneur in a government initiated programme and we can’t oppose their anxiety.”

Through interviews, the researcher could obtain similar responses from other entrepreneurs as well. After a series of such reactions, it was recognized that this form of overwork was resulting in the formation of a system of wages which exploited these workers. They were not getting paid for their surplus labour. Also, the key informants stated that these women entrepreneurs were paid less when compared to other professional firms where similar data entry works were handled. But the researcher was not satisfied with the above stated explanations. And the actual cause of the problem was identified through group discussions. It was very astonishing for the researcher to realize that the prime cause that resulted in family conflict was not the overwork done by these women entrepreneurs but it was the wage form followed by the agency which caused huge lag in getting paid for the finished task. Most of the women stated that the significant others or the dominant members of their family demanded a steady flow of enough financial capital at least every month in exchange of the surplus labour consumed in the process of production by the women entrepreneurs. One of the woman said during the discussions:

“Our loss at home would be rectified if we gain capital at work.”

Hence, it was this lack of steady flow of “indemnity” which resulted in conflicts in case of women working in KITEs. For some women, it was just the lack of attention they could otherwise give to their family members, which became a reason for conflict. The researcher also obtained political interruptions as another factor that affected the effective working of these women entrepreneurs.

5.2.4. Political hindrance

Although 33 percent of the respondents found political interference as a major problem which affected the working of KITEs but it was very challenging for the researcher to probe into this particular factor in order to gain maximum explanations. It was also difficult for the researcher to obtain ample examples to cite the problems related to this aspect of constraining factors. Only a very few of the respondents explained certain vague, obscure and unclear incidences which showcased the presence of political interruptions. The problem was mainly identified not with the politicians but with some of the Heads of the Government departments who usually gave preference to other sources for data entry works. According to these women entrepreneurs, they were labelled as leftist due to the attachment of LDF led Government of Kerala which initiated the formation of such a gender focussed programme. Some of the women respondents stated:

“We cannot give any definite examples of such incidences because it may harm our goodwill. There were certain rare incidences where they did associate us with the LDF party.”

Whereas certain other women who belonged to KITE answered ambiguously without discussing this particular issue in detail:

“It is difficult to say whether we have faced any problems due to our association with the LDF but there were certain instances where we presumed that the occurrences of some complications in obtaining enough work for our survival might be due to the political factor.”

In most of the cases, the researcher noticed that even though they agreed to the presence of political interruptions but never confirmed its existence by stating concrete and clear example. This was an acute limitation of this study with regard to this particular aspect. But the researcher understood that the problem of political interferences was not found in all the Government departments who associated with these women entrepreneurs. Through group discussions it was identified that these setbacks were not very frequent but some of the respondents did admit its presence which had delayed their remuneration and had even affected their customer base in various departments of LSGDs. In most of the cases, political hindrances were limited to a few utterances or statements which generated apprehensions or

concerns in the minds of these group of women entrepreneurs working in KITEs. Even the key informants were reluctant in stating any incidences that would help the researcher to understand the depth and breadth of this particular problem. One of the key informant went onto say:

“It is there and it is visible through newspapers. The Kudumbashree which we intended to form and build is not there anymore. The political influences were manifested in the form of transforming Kudumbashree into a commercial activity deviating from its foundations.”

Again, only one of the key informant seemed undisguised but others were mostly trying to block the discussions or providing information which resembled an ideal working environment of these women entrepreneurs.

5.2.5. Unstructured

It is essential to have an underlying structure for any social system or society. A structure defines a particular “territory” for any organisation. It also explains and shapes the rules, works, labour, resources, duties and relations. It forms a human network which provides a set of role to all those associated within a particular structure. Social structure comprises both ‘institutional structure’ and ‘relational structure’ (Scott and Marshall, 2009). According to Giddens, structures represent the rules and resources produced and reproduced by actors in their social practices (Turner, 1986). In this study, the agency under study was KITEs and from beginning onwards, the researcher experienced various hurdles to plot the entire structure and functioning of KITE. These enterprises directly come under KM but even the nodal agency lacked enough data to explain the proper constitution of KITE. It was identified that around 28 percent of the respondents recognized this factor as constraining. Through the discussions and interviews, the researcher found that the respondents faced certain problems like improper catalogue system, unclear working hours, leisurely behaviour from some of the group members, unresolved wage form, insufficient monitoring, lack of overall unity and discipline etc. associated with the unstructured nature of KITE. The formation of Unnathi IT Consortium during the year 2012 was also aimed at building a concrete structure and overall integration of these IT units but still, there are a lot of discrepancies in

the working pattern of KITEs. It was observed by the researcher, that most of the women entrepreneurs during discussions were vividly expressing the accounts of their experiences with the former authorities of KM who took the initial steps to structure the core institutional norms and meanings for KITEs. The researcher also noticed that most of the IT units did not resemble any official spot because there was no proper file system and they mostly kept cooking utensils in the office room itself. In some of the cases, the researcher found very unclean and dirty office spaces which seemed untouched by these women entrepreneurs for months. One of the leader of an active IT unit said:

“During the initial years, we received a lot of attention from the authorities and they sometimes inspected our enterprises as well, which made us always alert to maintain a neat and clean office with proper file system. But later on as those officials were shifted from Kudumbashree Mission, the whole system started disrupting leading to the present state of our enterprises.”

Apart from such IT units, the researcher also discovered certain enterprise which kept their office place very clean and followed a proper file system. They even did auditing every year with the help of any chartered accountant to maintain a systematic follow up of the rules. Through the group discussions, it was understood that those IT units which were monitored continuously by the DMCs of the respective region exhibited a dedication to uphold the already set standards. But still, an overall motivation to upgrade the organized functioning of this Government initiated programme was found lacking both amongst the group members and the authorities. The researcher also wanted to know the response of key informants with regard to this problem and the reactions obtained seemed very unusual because most of the officials stated that it is the responsibility of these women entrepreneurs to take care of their units and now KM was not responsible for any of such issues faced by them. Even the President of Unnathi IT Consortium who is also an entrepreneur herself said during an interview:

“I am also a woman like them and I have certain limits to demand an organized working pattern for all units. My position does not matter to them and most of them would oppose me, if I take such a stand. Also, the Kudumbashree Mission officials are not interested to interfere into such matters.”

The above stated response from an elected member of these IT units itself shows the lack of cohesion and awareness of responsibility. One of the key informant even went onto say that such a setback was also the result of irregular payments which demotivated these women to concentrate critically on the better functioning of KITEs. According to the bylaw of *Unnathi IT Consortium*, it was required to conduct election every year to select the President, Vice-President and Secretary of KITEs who would represent these women in all the official meetings with the authorities. But based on the interviews and discussions with these women, the researcher found that such elections were held only once amongst them. Some of the units which were found to be highly organized belong to the districts of Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur where as in case of Malappuram, Palakkad and Ernakulam, only some units were found to be ordered.

5.2.6. Geographical location

The issues associated with geographical location was also discussed by the respondents as constraining factor during the various interviews and discussions. The researcher also observed that some of the IT units were in a highly disadvantageous situation due to their location. In case of some other IT units, they were supported by their location because of their closeness to certain prime Government offices or market places. It was very difficult even for the researcher to discover some of the units as they were situated in a remote corner area of a building or in a far place at a long distance from any major market place.

From the table below, it is clear than eight IT units out of 63 are in the rural region and most of the KITEs in the Idukki district are sustaining in rural areas. The survival of such IT units were found to be difficult and some of them were even at the point of closing down. These KITEs were usually discovered by the researcher at a distant place away from any markets or Government offices and the local people were also not aware on the presence of IT units. The researcher also observed that such units typically concentrated on other activities apart from data entry like taking Photostat and scanning of documents. Also, they had hardly made any customer base. The Table 5.1 below shows a district wise distribution of KITEs based on their location.

Table 5.1. Distribution of KITEs based on region

No.	District	Number of KITEs	Region	
			Rural	Urban
1.	Kasargode	2	0	2
2.	Wayanad	2	0	2
3.	Kannur	7	1	6
4.	Kozhikode	3	0	3
5.	Malappuram	6	1	5
6.	Thrissur	6	0	6
7.	Palakkad	5	0	5
8.	Ernakulam	9	0	9
9.	Kottayam	4	0	4
10.	Idukki	4	3	1
11.	Alappuzha	3	0	3
12.	Pathanamthitta	1	0	1
13.	Kollam	5	2	3
14.	Thiruvananthapuram	6	1	5
Total		63	8	55

Source: Field work

One of the women entrepreneur belonging to an IT unit in the district of Idukki said:

“We are at the verge of closing down our IT unit because we hardly get any penny to survive on our own. Some of the members have already left the units due to the severe pressure from their family members. Also, it is not profitable to keep such a unit open as we would be forced to pay various bills of electricity, phone and internet.”

These situations were not limited to those IT units situated at rural regions alone, but some of the units which were located in urban regions also faced similar issues. The researcher during the fieldwork observed that a few of the units in almost all the districts were in a detrimental state because of their geographical location. Therefore, around 26 percent of the respondents indicated this drawback as a major problem faced by them due to the ignorance of Government officials. All of them preferred to obtain spaces near government offices but according to these women respondents, during initial years they were allotted offices near Government buildings but later, they were forced to leave such spaces to other locations without attaining any support from government officials of those regions. Therefore, such IT units shifted to commercial complexes to acquire good customer

base but because of severe financial instability, some of the units were forced to settle down with spaces usually at a remote corner of shopping complexes which devoid them from obtaining much customers. During fieldwork also, it was difficult for the researcher to locate some KITEs because of such substandard occupancy. This highly affected their customer base, again adding to financial insecurity. Whereas, in case of those IT units near government offices achieved huge profit because of their visibility and nearness to such prime places where most of the local people gathered for procuring G2C and B2C services. These KITEs also obtained adequate attention from Government officials due to the above stated reasons and this also helped them to meet officials frequently. The best examples for such units were found in the district of Kozhikode, Idukki, Palakkad and Thiruvananthapuram as majority of the units were situated in a favourable situation when compared to other districts. The executive members of this district also looked into all the issues faced by the women entrepreneurs belonging to their region.

5.2.7. Poverty

In absolute terms, poverty refers to a state in which the individual lacks the resources necessary of subsistence (Scott and Marshall, 2009). It was difficult for the researcher to uncover the very existence of this factor amongst these women entrepreneurs which was discovered through a number of interviews and discussions. This was a very important factor prevailing as 15 percent of the respondents identified this issue as a constrain existing amongst them. The prime reason for the development of such a state was financial instability and work deficit. These two factors caused major impact on the financial state of these women entrepreneurs. In some cases, it was found that these women were the major bread winners and without acquiring enough data entry works, it was becoming very difficult to sustain their household affairs. Through the group discussions, the researcher found that most of the units hired other college students for heavy data entry workloads. They even borrowed computer systems and printers under rent and for all these purpose, the mortgage was arranged by them personally. The problem began when they started to face huge delay in acquiring wages for the work done. The increased debt affected their sustenance and through the discussions, it

was further understood that, it is this problem which led to the closing down of most of the units. A respondent from Malappuram said:

“It is very difficult for us to survive under such circumstances because we are answerable to our family. My husband is working as a sweeper in a private hospital and he also has certain ailments which is making it hard for me to sustain the family alone.”

Mostly women from underprivileged KITEs with low income background suffered from such problems. As discussed in the previous sections, the main concern associated with these women was work deficit and financial instability and according to them, these were the two reasons which influenced their capital gain. To know the major cause of such factor, the researcher also collected data from key informants and it was very explicit from the discussions that they were aware of such conditions. The KM officials who became the key informants of this study found another factor - the unstructured state of Unnathi IT Consortium as the prime reason for such problems and they expressed their helpless state because according to them, it was not easy to interfere into the official matters of KITEs without obtaining any authoritative permission from higher authorities. They mostly blamed these women entrepreneurs for the emergence and sustenance of such problems. Overall, the researcher could observe that there was lack of association and integration between the professionals who worked for KITEs. There was a latent factor observed by the researcher which resembled itself as internal conflicts. And the reason for such sharp rise in the generation of conflicts amongst these groups was the subjective distinctiveness they associated with the experience of poverty in relative terms and they also began to compare their deprivation of resources to the standards enjoyed by other groups. They considered such a difference in material resources as an inequality and most of these definitions were subjective feelings of poverty.

5.2.8. Religion

Religion defines a set of beliefs, symbols, practices and rituals based on the idea of sacred and aids in uniting the society into a socio-religious community (Scott and Marshall, 2009). They also construct a normative structure which governs the social functions of individuals and explains the various duties

associated with them and values to be followed based on the gender of each individual. In this study also, few of the respondents i.e. 13 percent, especially belonging to an aristocratic orthodox society found religion as a constraining factor. Most of such responses were obtained from Muslim women entrepreneurs belonging to the Malappuram district. Malappuram is a Muslim concentrated region where some of the authoritarian and inflexible norms are found, mainly for women. It affected them, as they were forced to comply with the power of the dominant member of the family. They were reluctant in explaining the major problems but the researcher could probe into these issues through focus group discussions. A Muslim woman entrepreneur belonging to an active KITE in Malappuram stated during a discussion:

“Like other members of my group, I cannot stay late night to do data entry works especially during heavy work load. I have to reach home before 6:30 pm and it is an order given by my in-laws. They are also forcing me to stop this work but I have learned to defend my intentions of coming here and when I started to help my family members financially, they have stopped disputes.”

In some cases, these women were allowed to work in places near to their home and upon recommendation from any senior woman belonging to their family. Such problems were not limited to Muslim women alone but some Hindu women also faced such issues. There was gender differentiation observed in these cases as they were demanded to act and perform the idealistic role of a woman, a wife and a mother. But these women succeeded in upholding the objectives of their actions. In such cases also, the researcher discovered an inclination towards capital accumulation from the part of their family members because through group discussions, the respondents specified an unbinding approach from the family members when they produced income out of their work. It was also noticed by the researcher that all these religious norms and values became strong and powerful when these women were found incapable of generating financial capital through their data entry works.

It was also essential to know the liberating factors which enriched their experience with KITE. Concrete data was obtained through group discussions

which paved way for analysing the present status of the respondents. The following are the liberating factors discovered through a rigorous field work.

5.3. Liberating Factors

In this study, it indicates those factors which extricates or emancipates the act of production, in effect causing an unavoidable impact in the social system of the actors. It could be accomplished in the form of structural aspects of the organisation. It can also represent individual outlooks, expertise or capability to enhance the functionality of the process of production. The researcher wanted to probe into these liberating factors along with the constraining aspects of this programme because it can showcase the reality of the field of study. Here also, it was a strenuous task to unveil these vague, undefined and ambiguous aspects associated with the women respondents. Through the field work, the researcher investigated certain in-depth, subjective realities associated with the liberating factors. It was also a stimulating experience for the researcher to imbibe the way social realities were constructed from the everyday interactions of these women.

As explained in the preceding section, most of the information regarding this factor was collected using focus group discussions.

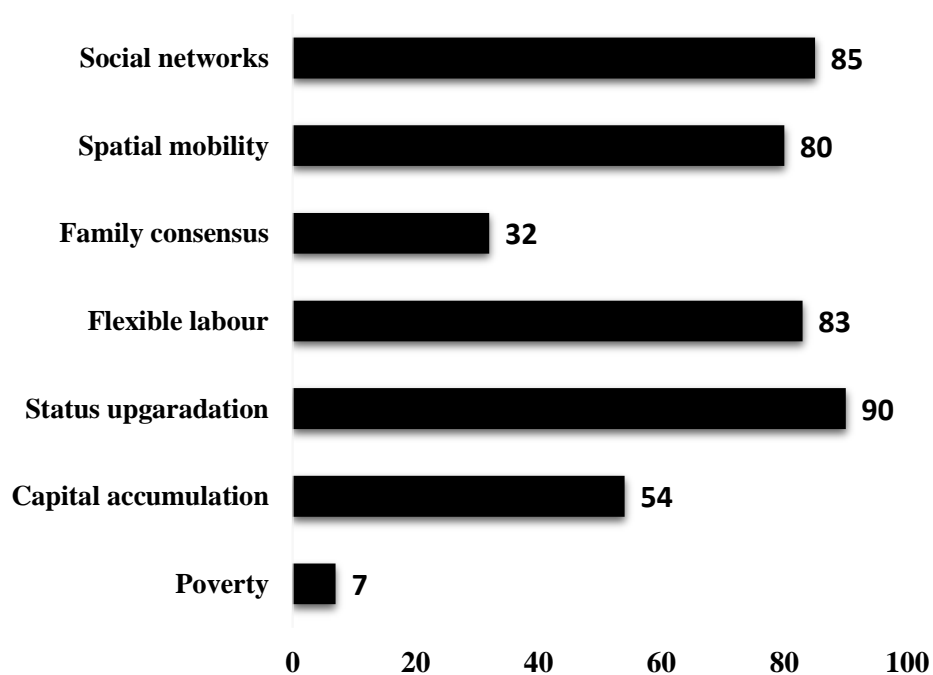


Figure 5.4. Percentage distribution of liberating factors

The researcher has also employed semi-structured interviews, observations and individual discussions to unveil the major liberating factors affecting them. Key informant interviews were also helpful in exposing certain factors which remained latent from the perspective of the group. Venn diagrams were also employed in certain cases for a better understanding of the explanations provided by the respondents. The information acquired through these methods enabled the researcher in merging the abstract data into meaningful facts for the better understanding of the social system. The Figure 5.4 above, showcases the liberating factors experienced by these women entrepreneurs as part of their participation in KITEs.

5.3.1. Status upgradation

Weber has defined status position in *Economy and Society* (1920) as the 'effective claim to social esteem'. It also designates a specific social estimation of honour which can be positive or negative. This social honour can be claimed by pursuing patterns of consumption and lifestyle. In this study, status upgradation refers to the amelioration which is expressed in the specific styles of life and patterns of interaction by the women respondents due to their participation in KITE. Kelkar and Nathan (2002) in their study argued that ICTs have the potential to redefine traditional gender roles. Approximately, 90 percent of the respondents distinguished this aspect as the prime liberating factor. Here, status indicates the organization of certain entitlements and privileges obtained through their association with KITEs. It has to be stated that these respondents were initially ignorant about such a factor persisting as a fundamental feature that tethered them with KITEs. It was a new awakening for them as they, especially through the interviews and discussions, could recognise this feature of status upgradation as a major captivating characteristic of KITE. It was rigorous process for the researcher to untangle this aspect of status upgradation. It was through these discussions from which the researcher could perceive the core cause for the formation of two types of status aspired by these women. The researcher explored that these women entrepreneurs had a subjective conception of their position in a status hierarchy which was restricted amongst group relations particularly for the purpose of production. Status within the production framework was defined as the monopoly

over the mode of production which included ICT, social networks and expertise. These were the three pillars identified by them as the constituting factors for production. Economic structure was not viewed as a determining factor for status amongst them but it was considered as a driving force to attain social mobility in society. They sought to gain prestige by acquiring these elements but the competition was mostly between the group leaders of the 63 KITEs. It was conflicting for the researcher to analyse and distinguish between the phenomenon of 'group status' and 'social status'. Group status designates the position of a person in the social structure of a group and it can be combined with the notion of the role played by a member in his or her group. Hence, it signifies the power of individuals over the most effective means to organize a definite production process.

Women who had higher group status were mostly the leaders who controlled other group members. During field visits, it was observed intensely by the researcher, to analyse the group interactions. Two sections of women entrepreneurs were formed due to their subjective evaluation of status in a group. The superordinates controlled other group members who became subordinates because of their inability to gather power over the three monopolies. This group of women also showcased the characteristics of a 'status group' as they were backed up by the prowess and competence of becoming the most preliminary female computer literate beneficiaries of a Government initiated ICT programme. Through the key informants, it was understood that these women entrepreneurs were the most experienced data entry operators in Kerala who had the capability of entering data even in the regional language. They also represented a closed group whose boundaries had become rigid due to the mutual acceptance they formed through such a long association. As a result, they did not prefer to share their profits, especially financial capital on a permanent basis with any new beneficiary of the programme.

The notion of group status got diminished when the researcher enquired on the necessity of gaining financial capital for social honour. Most of the respondents were highly inclined towards acquiring capital because it would lead to a better lifestyle, which explains the reason of the above stated antagonistic nature found in adding new members to the group. Hence, the perceived rise in

social status due to their participation in Government initiated ICT programme and their capability to accumulate social, financial and human capital was certain other reasons identified by these women respondents. But through most of the discussions, the researcher discovered that they preferred financial capital more and their tendency to accumulate it was another driving force which motivated them to work. In case of certain women who were mostly belonging to the superordinate category, desired to work even after facing huge struggles because of the already gained “group status” and the already existing notion of “status group” associated with highly prestigious and acclaimed Government organization called Kudumbashree Mission, which symbolically strengthened their integration and confidence in continuing their participation in KITEs.

5.3.2. Social networks

Social networks represent social actors such as individuals and organizations which lead to the path formation of effective knowledge transmission. In order to work in an enterprise where a group of individuals put their group effort to produce an output requires a minimum interaction at least with the group they work with. It also showcases the use of various social networking sites and apps that can help them to build an environment for mutual interaction. Similar findings were observed in the studies of Nath (2001), Sharma (2003) and Mitter (2003). Majority of the women respondents i.e. 85 percent spoke on the relevance of networking in their life. Most of the respondents confirmed that their association with *Kudumbashree* was the prime reason behind such intense and widespread networking. It was considered as a part of their labour to maintain effective contacts and relationships with their fellow members belonging to all the 63 IT units in Kerala. They were also well trained by the KM officials to prepare them as a unified single group. As they were the beginners of such women enterprises, it gained them maximum attention. Also, the workshops held at KM aimed at attaining maximum benefit out of the joint labour. Along with these connections, they also had to tether their enterprises with various government departments, officials and some private agencies so as to sustain the availability of data entry work. They also had to interact with the neighbourhood, local community, political leaders and social workers in order to propagate the activities undertaken by them. The researcher also noted

through focus group discussions that those who lacked enough social networks were either dependent on other group members or were the followers of the strongest team member. They were aware of this situation but never liked to work hard in order to create networks because they did not find any adequate reason for the same. One of the respondent reacted stating:

“I joined this group in 2000 and since then, I have made all the efforts along with my group to pull ourselves out of all the misery we have undergone. The most problematic period came when KM withdrew its support and asked us to make a consortium. It is true that they intended to strengthen us by making us self-reliant but some of the groups broke down and stopped working. Our group was also on the verge of it as some of the members left us due to their family issues and other job opportunities. Due to our association with the Panchayath president, we were able to get certain data entry works from them and it was during this period when I understood the importance of networking. We have tried our best to create a network of our customers, mainly government officials, local community and political leaders so as to retrieve maximum works. Apart from data entry we also do online transactions of various bills, DTP work, file printing and Photostat.”

Most of the respondents were found to be active in using social networking sites and applications as well, like Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp. Hafkin and Taggert (2001) also found that training in ICT opened new avenues for them in the field of communication and information sharing. They used it mainly to stay in connection with their significant others like relatives and friends. Some of them even used this as a medium to improve and spread the label of KITEs. They even obtained certain works from other private agencies and institutions like schools, colleges and hospitals by contacting through such online sites. Some of the members communicated with the government officials through Facebook and Whatsapp. Through discussions, the researcher found that such a reformation was the result of their association with the KM. All the 63 IT units had an official e-mail account through which they communicated official instructions. The key informants also stated during interviews that they also preferred sending information to all the KITEs electronically because it would reduce the time taken otherwise. Most of the instructions for any data entry assignment was handled online and sometimes online tutorials of the data entry software was sent to them.

5.3.3. Flexible labour

This term refers to the adaptable work schedules of these women entrepreneurs which allows them to alter workday start and finish times. It is in contrast with the traditional work arrangements, as the employees are capable of reporting and leaving work within certain limits. Around 83 percent of the women respondents have identified this feature as a liberating factor. Through the focus group discussions, the researcher understood that every enterprise had defined a core working period within which these women had to be in attendance at work. But during most of the field visits, it was observed that only a very few of the group members arrive on time. Through the group discussions, it was identified that most of the women don't follow the stipulated working hours which had affected the efficiency and productivity of some units. There were certain contradictions amongst certain group members regarding this unprofessional attitude undertaken by some of them which indicates severe lack of rigid norms and regulations. Huyer (2006) in his study showed that women attained increased agency, autonomy and control by taking part in an ICT based enterprise. It was through key informant interviewing which guided the researcher in analysing the actual need for such an employee oriented working pattern. One of the founding members of KITE explained:

“While starting such an enterprise in Thiruvananthapuram, our prime aim was to provide employment to majority of the women belonging to this district. We could obtain only five computers for data entry work and there were ten women entrepreneurs for work. Hence, we came up with an idea of implementing ‘flexitime’ in this situation. These women divided into two groups. They worked in shifts, where one group worked from 8 am to 2 pm and the other group worked for 2 pm to 6 pm or 8 pm. Evening times were flexible based on the load of data entry work. This method helped these women a lot as they could concentrate on their family responsibilities as well.”

But through the field visits, the researcher could observe that presently there were only five or seven members in each group which was insufficient for them to put this pattern into practice and most of the members were not even following the normal working hours of their respective KITE. Through the discussions, the researcher discovered that the prime reason for such failure was

their family commitment which deviated them from succeeding in achieving a professional outlook towards their work. Some of them even stated that the main cause of such unorganized conduct from the part of some women entrepreneurs was due to the deficit in the structure of KITEs which led to extreme flexibility in the most essential institutional norms. But in contrast to such observations, the researcher also discovered that this work pattern proved to be beneficial for these women as they could devote their most productive hours to work and effectively manage both work and family responsibilities. Women could take care of family members and household matters. It also succoured them with the convenience of dealing with the matters related to their children.

5.3.4. Spatial mobility

This factor explains the potent ability of an individual to move freely beyond their social space. This possessed capability can be the result of enhanced social capital or a need of work that can prompt them to move away from their location. Spatial mobility is an unavoidable part for any highly involved women entrepreneur belonging to KITE. They were supposed to travel for attending official meetings, or for informal gatherings in order to propagate their objectives and programme as well as to brain storm ideas to solve their problems. Societal norms and values don't allow much mobility for women keeping in view their safety and security but these women travel where ever they want in order to fulfil their aims. Kenny (2002) and Rice (2003) have showed that due to increased agency and confidence gained by participating in IT enterprises, women travel more and develop a wider network of contacts. This increased ability and liberty to move from one place another on their own was identified by 80 percent of the respondents as a privilege attained due to their participation in KITE. They mostly travelled in group and before starting journey they used to communicate with every other KITE in the 14 districts of Kerala. This task of coordinating the visit was mainly executed by the executive members of Unnathi Consortium. Some of the members could not travel because of the several restrictions faced from their family. They were constrained by the family responsibilities and especially in case of Muslim families, the women were forced to stay back due to the religious norms and values.

One of the group leader and executive member of KITE stated during discussions:

“I travel a lot for working in KITE. We need to attend workshops before every project and we also have to attend certain personality classes organized by them. I don't have any problem at home as my parents look after my children much better than I do. My in-laws are also very supportive and they motivate me to participate in such activities.”

Through the discussions, it was discovered that as the works were mostly time bound, they were forced to complete the data entry work within the stipulated time period. Even though, it is difficult for women to stay away from their home and do the work sitting in their office for all day and night but in the case of KITE, it was observed that most of the women entrepreneurs breached societal norms and worked till late night. This aspect associated with their working pattern had also supported them in enhancing their confidence to travel during uncomfortable hours. Also, they were not restricted much while visiting their family and friends because they had proved themselves to be self – reliant and had built up a powerful image of confident individuals. The key informants supported the above stated finding as they reassured the researcher the impact of various personality and group development workshops undertaken by them. This is another factor which portrays the role played by KM in shaping the abilities of these household women.

5.3.5. Capital accumulation

Capital was accumulated through the collective labour performed to exercise greater control over means of production, relations of production and life choices. In this case, the researcher has focussed mainly on the six types of capital – social capital, financial capital, human capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital and political capital. Social capital describes the type of relations that exist between individuals as located within both families and communities (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987). Financial capital provides access to economic resources to make the process of production operational. Human capital shows the education and training undertaken by individuals or groups of workers. It also arises out of any activity able to raise individual worker productivity (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Cultural capital represents the various symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be

strategically used as resources in social action (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital can be referred to as the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition, and serves as value that one holds within a culture (Ibid.) where as political capital can be considered as the proliferation of all the above stated capital which in turn contributes to augment the capability of these women entrepreneurs to mobilize public and gain a dominating status. Mitter (2005) has shown that women gain access to capital by mobilizing the opportunities available through ICT projects.

The researcher also used Venn diagrams to understand this factor in detail. Two types of data were collected in order to know the perceptions of these women respondent and the outcome of their participation. This visual method is an essential way to understand the role of individuals/ institutions and the degree of their importance in decision making (Mukherjee, 2003). These diagrams consist of circles that represent individuals or institutions and its size shows the degree of their influence. If the circles overlap, it indicates the interactions between them and if these circles stay separate then it means there are no contacts. The Figure 5.5 below shows the rate of importance of the six capitals according to these women entrepreneurs. The data was collected using interviews and validated using focus group discussions.

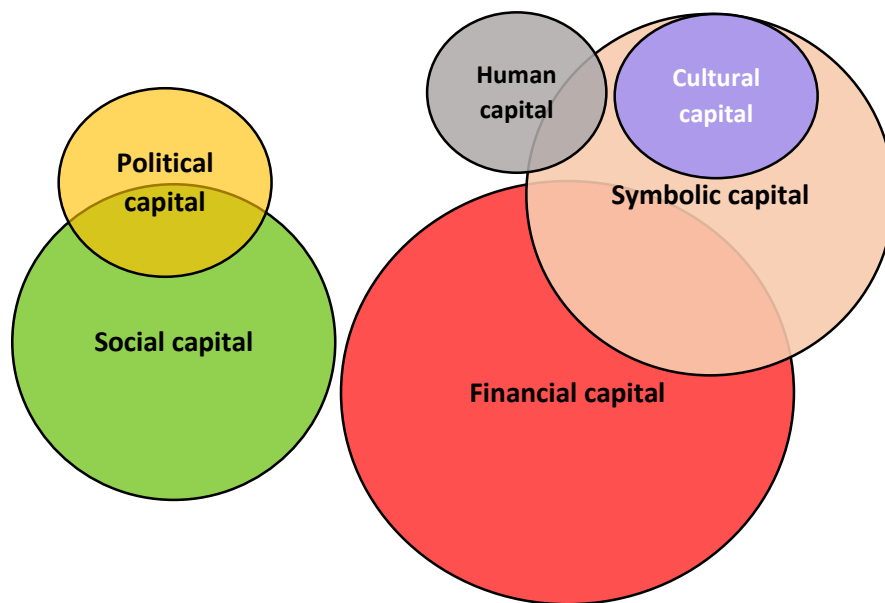


Figure 5.5. Expected Capital accumulation

This figure indicates that these women entrepreneurs preferred financial capital more than any other capital. The least importance was given to human capital which has been explained in the previous chapters as well. This also showcases the fact that they joined KITE mainly for attaining financial capital which was followed by symbolic capital, which according to them was the accompanying factor of increased financial status. Through the discussions, it became very evident the respondents were motivated towards gaining monetary benefits for themselves and their family. All the other factors seemed just like auxiliary matters and did not mean any relevance to them. They did not give much importance to gaining status by getting employment but it was stimulating to understand the symbolic meaning they gave to their association with ICT. During the early 1990s, getting involved with ICT and attaining an employment which utilized ICT as tools was considered very prestigious and it was a stimulus for them to have an acquaintance with ICT. Most of the respondents did not realize the importance of human capital, as they were not interested to acquire experience from KITEs so as to try for the betterment of KITEs or get employed in other firms.

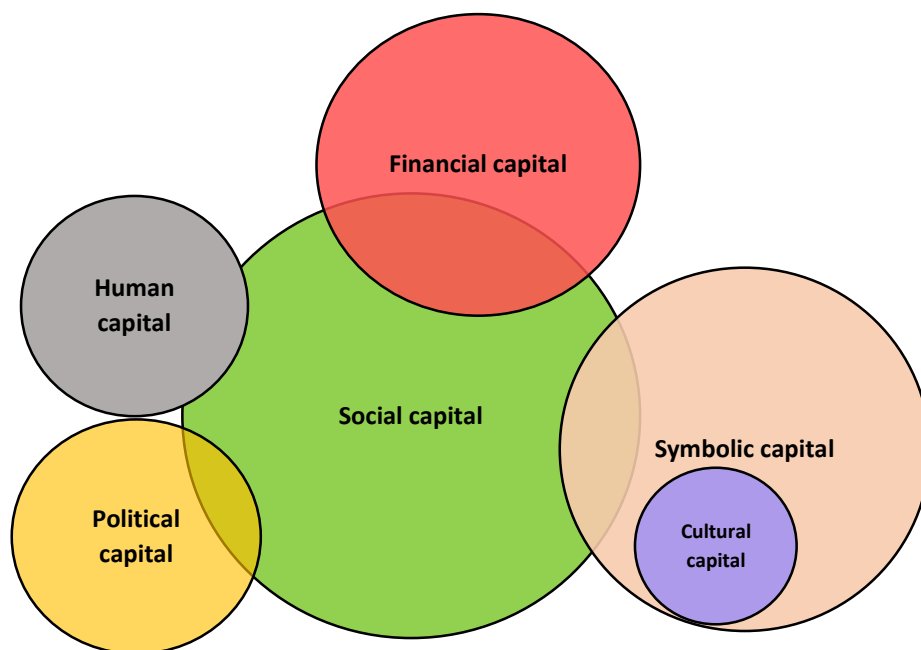


Figure 5.6. Actual Capital accumulation

It should also be noted that they were least bothered in enhancing their educational qualification or changing their physical appearance or speech or even

the kind of clothes they wore. It was also observed through the fieldwork that these women came in a very casual dress to their IT units, because those units resembled highly informal places to them. If the preceding section shows preconceived ideas of women entrepreneurs, then the Figure 5.6 above showcases the actual accumulation of the six capital by the women entrepreneurs of KITE which is an aftermath of their association with the same. In reality, they mainly gathered social capital followed by symbolic capital and financial capital. This was due to the association with KM as these women were supposed to construct effective social networks that would support them in sustaining their production process. Also, Kudumbashree is a women focussed empowerment programme which enhances the communicative capability of women especially through neighbourhood groups. In actual case, they understood that the gathered social status which was the result of the social capital achieved over years of participation in Kudumbashree. They were highly appreciated and honoured due to their participation in one of the highly active women network coordinated by the Kudumbashree Mission. But through the focus group discussions, the researcher discovered that they were not satisfied with the actual capital accumulation.

They wanted to gain more monetary benefits but various setbacks led to the fall in the accumulation of financial capital. It seemed as if they were not expecting much uplift in the case of enriching their experience and skills but in contrast to their perception, most of them upgraded themselves in terms of various professional courses. The key informants stated that they had conducted different programmes for these women in order to upgrade their skills and abilities. Approximately 54 percent of the respondents found this aspect as liberating because it motivated them to sustain their working environment. The researcher could also observe that majority of the respondents were primarily concerned only with accumulating financial capital and they were passively curious towards acquiring other capitals.

5.3.6. Family consensus

In general, it refers to a form of agreement between family members over certain values and norms which constructs the basis for social order. The researcher

also noted that 66 percent of the respondents found family conflict as a major constraining factor whereas 32 percent of them pointed family consensus as a major liberating factor. Family is the fundamental social group consisting of parents and their children. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Welfare (2015), even though family laws govern family relations and seek to protect the vulnerable family members, including women, children and older persons, fair family law frameworks are especially vital to ensure gender equality and tackle various forms of violence in families. But social customs, often reflected in the form of laws in society condone practices reinforcing gender inequality within families which are mainly perpetuated for economic reasons and social norms. But in case of some women belonging to KITE, it was discovered that they were getting accepted family due to their association with Kudumbashree. Along with KM, it was the vast social capital gathered as a result of such a long experience with KITEs. One of the women entrepreneur stated:

“We proved ourselves by starting own enterprise and we are guided by Kudumbashree Mission which resembles the largest social network of women in the whole world. We get immense support and recognition from community which certainly has enhanced the respect we used to get from our family. ”

When certain group of women pointed their association with KM as the reason for family acceptance, there was another group of women entrepreneurs who found their self-dependence as the reason for such a change experienced by them in family. Another women entrepreneur said to the researcher during an intense discussion:

“We can produce our own capital and we also help our family members during financial needs. I look after my child’s demands, especially education which has helped my husband and as a result, I get enough appreciation from family.”

Through the interviews and FGDs, it was understood that these units received maximum profit during the initial 5 to 7 years which helped them to support their family and collect assets as part of personal property. It was also found that some of the units got ₹ 50,000 per head while completing a huge data entry project. It was during these years that they saved money for their personal expenses and family needs. Hence, a lot of women stated that the reason for such acceptance

was the result of their association with the numerous activities performed as part of KITE. Their families became aware of their skills and capabilities only after these women started to accomplish the material needs of the family members. This raised their status amongst their family members and community and as a result they were participated in most of the decision making process of the household. It was also identified through the field work that such cases were mostly found in IT units which were running in profit like some of the units in Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram.

5.3.7. Poverty

It was a spectacular finding for the researcher to discover the functional role played by poverty in case of these women entrepreneurs belonging to KITEs. Only a very few of the respondents, i.e. 7 percent indicated this aspect as liberating but it was an intriguing feature which motivated the researcher to probe into it more. Through the interviews, the researcher found that it was the intense impulse to overcome the state of poverty which provoked them to sustain their employment. These women were from low financial background which initially motivated them to enter into such government initiated programme. One of the women respondent responded:

“My husband is not well and he is striving hard to work for our family. I used to work as LIC agent before marriage but due to the benefits which can be obtained due to participating in Government initiated programme motivated me to join KITE. But after some years, we started to face financial instability and now are running in loss. Still, I have not stopped working and through my networking skills, I try to gather data entry works from local self-government offices. ”

The researcher also noticed that such a deprived state was playing a major role in enhancing their skills as most of such IT units were becoming self-dependent and creative to obtain maximum number of data entry projects. These women couldn't gain and save enough income because they were mostly from extreme poor background which forced them to use the obtained money for covering up their family needs, some of them even repaid their family loans after joining KITE. During FGDs, these women cherished to recall the past as they wanted to relive it and seemed like they are still awaiting for the same in future as these units received

maximum profit during the initial five to seven years which helped them to support their family and collect assets as part of personal property.

5.3.8. Need satisfaction

Apart from interviews, the researcher got qualitative data on need satisfaction which was another important liberating factor which provoked them to work for KITEs. The researcher probed into the details by continuing discussion on the same using intense group discussions. Venn diagrams were also employed for an in depth understating on this feature. A need is something that is deemed necessary, especially something that is considered necessary for the survival of the person or organization. Even though these hierarchy of needs resemble Maslow's theory of self-actualization but the researcher could not obtain certain aspects associated with self-actualization. According to their perception on need, it was discovered that they preferred material needs followed by physiological needs which includes food, shelter, sleep and protection from extreme hazards (Scott and Marshall, 2009). This was followed by security needs which required some kind of order, certainty and structure in their lives. Then, social and self-esteem needs became paramount which resembles self-respect, interaction and association with other people.

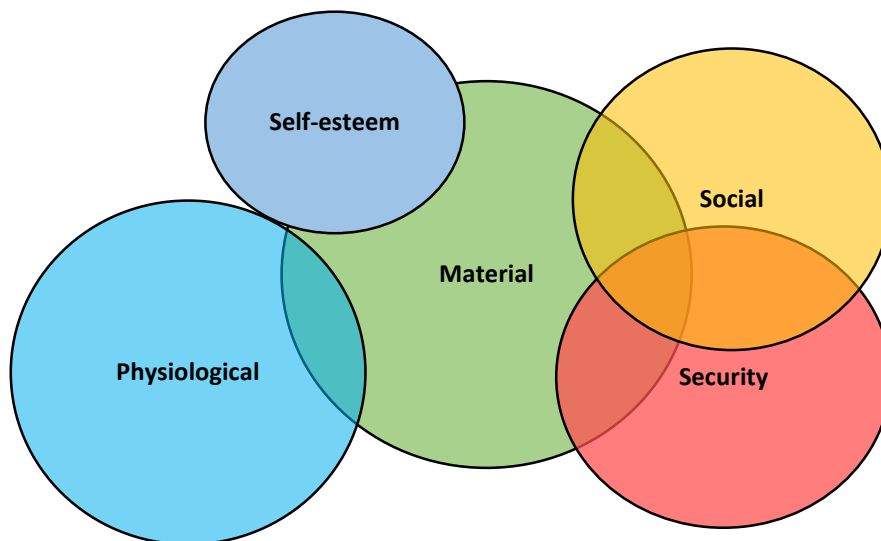


Figure 5.7. Hierarchy of needs

Most of the respondents during discussions stated that the most attractive element associated with this project was its assurance to satisfy their material needs

which would help them to fulfil physiological needs. Least importance was given to self-esteem which they pointed out will obviously be the outcome of what they would experience through the work. The Figure 5.7 above showcases the perceived hierarchy of needs obtained through the field study.

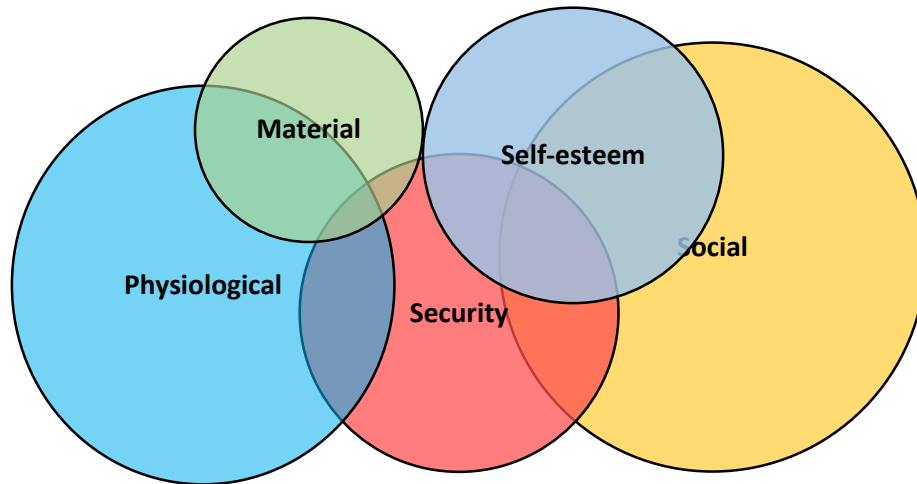


Figure 5.8. Actual need satisfaction

Figure 5.8 above showcases the actual need satisfaction of these women respondents. In reality, in contrast to their perception, social needs were satisfied the most followed by physiological needs. Their self-esteem was highly influenced by their participation in KITE which led to the formation of a vast social network.

It was found that more than material need satisfaction, it was the social needs or the gathered social capital which increased their self-respect. They realized the various skills and capabilities which was imparted to them through their association with KM. Material needs remained least satisfied because of the various financial inconsistencies faced by them during their working period. But most of the key informants stated during discussions that these women were provided with enough opportunities to satisfy their material needs. They also responded by explaining the guiding role that was undertaken by the KM and according to the key informants, it was not the responsibility of the KM officials to manage the financial flow or wage system of KITEs.

5.4. Conclusion

The whole process of experiencing these constraining and liberating factors to reach to the goal of empowerment resembled the stage of adaptation to the researcher. These actors were actually adapting to their environment and were motivated by the tendency to optimize gratification. This chapter showcased the associated constraining and liberating factors which not only affected their process of production but also laid impact on their social world as well. It has to be pointed out that it was comparatively easy for the researcher to find out the liberating factors when compared to the constraining factors. It seemed as if most of the respondents were taking a diplomatic stand and hence, withdrew from explaining some of the actual cases of hurdles experienced by them which mainly includes political factors. It was very difficult for the researcher to obtain data on this factor which remains as a limitation of this study.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

6.1. Introduction

The epistemological belief embedded in interpretive research is that the social process is not deduced by formulating hypothesis, co-variances or degrees of freedom but understood by getting involved inside the world of those generating it (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Rosen, 1991). Interpretive research asserts that social reality is constructed by the individuals through their action and interaction. Thus, understanding these social processes requires understanding of the social context which includes the meanings, practices, roles and tacit norms shared by humans working towards some shared goals (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). In order to get a fundamental notion of the actor's view of the social world and their role in it, a rigorous preliminary analysis was employed to delineate the concepts required for the study. Apart from focussing on the immediate aims, events and actions of these Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala, this study has understood the roots of the encountered social changes experienced by the women beneficiaries. The abstract concepts were concretized by operationalizing with the use of indicators and procedures that was used to observe or measure them. It demonstrates the specific way of making these concepts meaningful which are relevant only to this study.

The conceptualisation and measurement of empowerment has been a widely discussed topic of a number of studies which attempt to quantify empowerment epitomizing certain comparisons between locations and time (Mehra, 1997; Kabeer, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2012; Huyer and Sikoska, 2003; Mitter, 2004; Parker, 2005; Swamy, 2006; Kabeer et.al, 2008; Varghese, 2011; Sohail, 2014; Torri and Martinez, 2014). These studies sometimes seek to demonstrate the impact of specific interventions on women's empowerment and sometimes discuss the implications of women's empowerment for the purpose of desired policy objectives. But a concrete and clear definition of empowerment has

not been accepted by everyone as they fail to fully elucidate the intricate and multiple ways in which power operates in the domain of women empowerment (Kabeer, 2000). It is this fragmented nature of power within empowerment which makes the process of empowerment understandable (Smith, 2005). Now, this conception makes it possible to conclude that even those who seem to be least powerful have innate resources of power and therefore, are potential agents to determine the future of their own lives. Kabeer (1999) elucidates this by stating that, 'in reality even those who appear to have very little power are still able to resist, subvert and sometimes transform the conditions of their lives'. However, given the contested nature of the concept, it is required to clarify at the outset how the researcher will be using it in the entire work as it will be from this standpoint that various measurement attempts will be evaluated. In subsequent sections, the researcher will illustrate the various measures of women's empowerment, the intended meaning of the concepts, the values they incorporate and the appropriateness of these indicators in apprehending the idea of empowerment.

6.2. Conceptualising Empowerment

One way of describing power is in terms of the ability to realise one's intention even against the resistance of others (Weber, 1920) or it demonstrates the dialectics between structure and agency. It can also be explained as the capacity of the individuals to act independently and make free choices against the patterned arrangements which limit the choices and opportunities available. Hence, it entails a process of change by which those who have been denied chances acquire such an ability. It also implies how the notion of empowerment is inescapably linked with the condition of disempowerment (Kabeer, 2000). Now, a conscious attempt to overcome the structural barriers and to embark the process of change from self-realized deprived state requires an understanding of one's insufficiency in meeting some of the fundamental needs. These needs can be classified into five categories which are namely physiological, material, cognitive, social and security needs. It became obvious through the discussions that these women adopted Kudumbashree IT enterprises (KITEs) because of its futuristic and providential aspect of effectively engaging ICTs. For them it implied the possibility of an alternative to

exercise a meaningful choice. Kabeer (2000) states that there is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because the chance to make a significant choice to acquire one's basic need is often ruled out if they lack sufficient means to achieve it. The programme was a participatory, women oriented and integrated approach relying strongly on government intervention, it led to mass acceptance and employment of women basically from below poverty line (Heeks and Arun, 2010). Their first step in the process towards self – empowerment is involved in the action to accept the programme as such with its norms and values. These actors were oriented towards the perceived outcome, mainly a safe and secure livelihood which seemed assured because of the effective use of the future technology – ICT. They were motivated and directed towards gaining financial capital, which was the most highlighted aspect of the programme during its initiation.

Along with financial capital, they were also expected to imbibe the five *capitals* which can be the result of participation in the process. These capitals include social, cultural, symbolic, political and human capital. The empowerment which the researcher seeks to understand are the implications of the accumulation of any of the capital stated above. Empowerment of women can be considered in two ways: as a process where there is a change to attain greater equality or greater freedom of choice and action. As an agency, empowerment is considered as a process where women themselves must have significant involvement (Laizu et.al, 2010). In this work, the researcher emphasises both these notions of empowerment and attempts to comprehend the agency in the actor – situation system which is the result of internalized capitals. Hence, empowerment in this study is explained as the process of implementing agency in the social system where the plurality of actors interact with each other in a physical environment to achieve valued ways of what Kabeer (2000) refers to as 'being and doing'.

Apart from illustrating a broad definition of empowerment, this study has also focussed on the social, economic and political domains of the empowerment experienced by these respondents. The following are the operationalized definitions of social, economic and political empowerment which are relevant to the present study.

6.3. Social Empowerment

It is universally accepted all over the world that ICTs offer great opportunities for the comprehensive social and economic development of people and its potential as a technology for promoting micro-enterprises by poor women is still unused in many countries (Prasad and Sreedevi, 2007). There are various women centred empowerment schemes prevailing in India like General Grant in-aid for Innovative projects, *Dhanalakshmi*, Gender Budgeting scheme, *SWADHAR Greh* etc. but still Kudumbashree Mission prevails as an innovative overarching poverty reduction programme with a holistic approach (Shihabudheen, 2013). Much of the works done on Kudumbashree were optimistic in elucidating the various benefits of micro-finance and micro-enterprises because of their uniqueness in encouraging innovative ideas rather than “tried and tested” ones (Devika and Thampi, 2007; Prasad and Sreedevi, 2007; Tiwari, 2009; Manoj, 2012; Prabhu, 2015). Similar to these research works, the researcher has also attempted to illustrate the three domains of empowerment - social, economic and political to explore the attributes that create an image of the social system where these women work and how they perceive the everyday reality. It has also paved way to understand the enabling influence of the collective - organizational structure in supporting these actors to voluntarily broaden their possibilities of controlling factors that are essential for sustaining their life. Hence, the researcher has operationally defined social empowerment as the process involving both internal and external change that finds expression in the ability to “look at self”, act and implement the practical knowledge, the information, skills, perform collective actions and hence, constructing an environment for undistorted communication. From the methodological point, it is essential to identify social empowerment indicators for the analytical clarity of what is to be measured. Therefore, based on the above written definition, the researcher had to sort out the accepted meanings, discuss them with subject experts, key informants and authors, analyse them through pilot study and in turn evaluate them, then explanations were formed relevant to the topic of discussion. There are six social empowerment indicators in this study namely reflexive, expressive, futuristic, social capital, mobility and group solidarity. These indicators explicitly define social empowerment and are measured

based on the responses to questions asked to the respondents. There are a set of seven or eight questions under each indicator which are to be answered on the basis of Likert's five point scale. Semi-structured interviews, group interviews, daily routine analysis, direct observation and mobility map were the methods used for obtaining in depth data on the above discussed indicators. The researcher has also added two cases which were identified through interviews and these cases show the two contrary view points on the same attribute.

All the indicators of social empowerment are discussed in the following section of this chapter.

6.3.1. Reflexive

Conceptualizing oneself requires the rigorous understanding of the notion of self - identity experienced through verbal and non-verbal interactions with other people. It was Giddens (1986) who charted the development of the reflexive project of the self. He argues that in late modern societies the self "has to be reflexively made" (Biesta and Zhao, 2008). It is hence, not seen as something given but it is generated routinely and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. Empowerment draws insights from self - development which is the outcome of enhanced personal growth and human potential (Adams, 2008). It also results in effective participation, amplified with regard to decisive contribution to achieve the self – set goals. Self – realization and self – confrontation accelerates the process of becoming intrinsically self –aware and self - critical and these are furthered by being reflexive. Hence, being reflexive, equips a person to identify, interpret and achieve control over the aspects of actions taken in response to the information received. Following Giddens (1986), in this study reflexivity is understood as a process rather than a state and is inherently involved in the competence of the actors. The Table 6.1 below feeds into the ideas of reflexivity as discussed above.

Table 6.1. Frequency distribution on Reflexive

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percent)
1.	I know my potential.	Strongly Agree	73	26.07	43
		Agree	112	40	

		No Opinion	83	29.64	
		Disagree	07	2.5	
		Strongly Disagree	05	1.79	
2.	I am aware of my limitations.	Strongly Agree	76	27.14	43
		Agree	104	37.15	
		No Opinion	90	32.14	
		Disagree	07	2.5	
		Strongly Disagree	03	1.07	
3.	I am aware of my rights and responsibilities.	Strongly Agree	87	31.07	60
		Agree	173	61.79	
		No Opinion	12	4.29	
		Disagree	05	1.78	
		Strongly Disagree	03	1.07	
4.	I am resilient in dealing with difficult conditions.	Strongly Agree	65	23.21	43
		Agree	134	47.86	
		No Opinion	63	22.5	
		Disagree	10	3.57	
		Strongly Disagree	08	2.86	
5.	I have demonstrated perseverance in my work.	Strongly Agree	71	25.36	40
		Agree	121	43.21	
		No Opinion	55	19.64	
		Disagree	24	8.57	
		Strongly Disagree	09	3.21	
6.	I have attained leadership qualities.	Strongly Agree	48	17.14	20
		Agree	94	33.57	
		No Opinion	78	27.86	
		Disagree	43	15.36	
		Strongly Disagree	17	6.07	
7.	I have equal status in my family.	Strongly Agree	37	13.21	33
		Agree	178	63.58	
		No Opinion	00	00	
		Disagree	65	23.21	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	

Source: Field work

Knowing one's **potential** determines the capacity of an individual to develop the idea of the future they wish to have. It shows that the abilities and qualities of a person are no more latent but manifested in the form of their actions. 66 percent of the respondents positively reacted to this question which illustrates the fact that majority of them are aware of their capabilities. A study by Manoj (2012) shows that women gain confidence and become aware of their capabilities after their participation in Kudumbashree. This kind of awareness could be developed if these women entrepreneurs are working for a long period of time and it was true in case of this study as all the respondents had more than approximately seven years of experience in the field of ICT. Through the group discussions and key-informant interviews, the researcher understood that the KM officials were keen to enhance their skills by providing them personality development classes which consisted of workshops, lectures, discussions and group activities like games. Sreeram et.al (2015) in their study demonstrated the catalytic role played by the KM officials in motivating these women to start own microenterprises. 34.29 percent of the entrepreneurs were not confident on their own consciousness regarding the individual prospects achieved through participation in KITEs. Amongst these respondents, 4.29 percent disagreed denying any development on their awareness of individual abilities. By further discussions, the researcher could find that they were inhibited to participate effectively in the personality development classes which was organized by the KM officials from beginning itself and in their group also, some of them remained reserved and did the task which was assigned to them by the respective group leaders. The following are the cases identified by the researcher which can explain the disparity:

Case I: Latha looked like a middle class woman with a very anxious face which undoubtedly showed her interest to express the viewpoints of herself and the group. Even though the question was asked to her, it seemed as if she was ready to speak for all of them. She came out with a very interesting story of her past, which was some 12 years back when she would hide if she had found someone asking her a question to convey her experience. But now she feels confident and aware of what as an individual are her functions and responsibilities.

“I understood my abilities only after coming to KITEs when I became the leader of my group. I am from an orthodox joint family with restrictions imposed on women but this platform has helped me to uncover my skills by continuously dealing with assignments which are time bound. Through the various interesting personality enhancement classes and workshops arranged by them during the initial four years created a self-awareness in most of us through which we understood the fact of where we stand as an individual. We discovered more on us by striving hard to sustain our group in times of hardships. I also help my family in case of any emergency and I can confidently speak my words in front of anyone.”

Case II: Maya hesitated while interacting and most of her answers seemed very coy. She didn't go on with explanations, rather preferred to limit her answers in two or three sentences. It was difficult for the researcher to probe into her ideas in order to disclose her experiences with regard to her awareness on potential. After a long discussion, she spoke about her outlook on herself.

“I don't think KITEs have helped me to uncover my potential because I can't find any particular changes in case of my personality. It was difficult for me to engage in group activities like games as I don't understand its need. I am here to work and get my living with my family as I have no other safe place to work. I do what is told to me by the group leader and I am happy with that.”

The researcher also tried to probe into their history in order to understand whether the changes experienced by them were actually due to their participation in KITEs. Through the interviews, it became clear that they lacked a concrete and definite understanding on their capabilities before they became the part of Kudumbashree. Most of them stated that the decision taken by them to join such a venture was itself a realization of the fact that they had the ability to work and earn. After completing their first assignment on data entry works, they became more confident regarding their own potential. Hence, it could be stated that it was their participation in KITEs which caused such a drastic change in their personality. But it was very stimulating to discover that the degree of absorbing these skills deferred based on the roles played by them. The group leaders were found to have comparatively more awareness on themselves and others potential when compared to those who followed them. All the IT units had such leaders and they showcased

higher amount of self-confidence and responsiveness. The reason could be identified through a study done by Thampi and Kawlra (2011) which illustrated that most of the group's activities were done by the respective group leaders and they received more chances to interact with other, hence, they upgrade their potential. Some group leaders of Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad were found to be exceptionally skilled. For a better understanding of one's self, it is also essential to know an individual's limitations along with their potential. This awareness of oneself can help individuals to overcome their impediments which is a required attribute for empowerment.

Limitations are the inhibitions of an individual that limit their abilities to act in a suitable way that can lead to their own benefits. These limitations can get manifested in the form of low communication skills, low family support, low self-esteem and less IT awareness. Such limitations can cast grave doubt on the optimism of those who wish to use emerging technologies for development (Sood, 2001). These restraints can control their effective participation in group activities and hence, cause disruption in the overall output of the group. The data reveals that 64.29 percent of the respondents are aware of the various constraints they have to face while working in KITEs. Most of the limitations are associated with low family support. Women are the cruellest victims of deprivation and destitution in the households (Venugoplan, 2014). According to the women entrepreneurs, they were sufficiently assured on the skills related to IT because of their long experience in the same field. Almost all the respondents had more than ten years of experience which is more than necessary to become conscious of their own disabilities. 3.57 percent of the respondents disagreed regarding their knowledge on self – limitations which is due to less association in the activities of the group or due to low social transactions between individuals which can lead to low understanding of the inner experience of an actor. A high self-esteem can also make individuals to disagree with any limitations that can affect them with regard to their activities. In a study (Neff, 2003) it was found that even high self-esteem may have negative corollaries. Some psychologists argue that an over-emphasis on evaluating and liking the self may lead to narcissism, self-absorption, self-centeredness, and a lack of concern for others (Damon, 1995; Seligman, 1995). 32.14 percent of the women entrepreneurs

were unsure of whether they own a limitation that can cause a hindrance in their activities. It can be because of low understanding of the experiences one deals with while undergoing challenges or may be because they were reluctant in sharing their limitations to an unknown person. To illustrate the preceding section, the researcher has provided two cases.

Case III: Devika was the group leader of the KITE situated in midst of a city but in an old building with an old room consisting of five computers and some old dirty chairs. The room was untidy and files were not placed properly. Work was going on when the researcher reached there in order to interact with them. She looked welcoming and was prompt to interact with the researcher when compared to other fellow group mates. She kept her work aside and started speaking.

“I am very happy that someone has come to interact with us in order to know our problems. In the past also many people have come to study our enterprise as it is one of its kind in Kerala. If you ask about our limitations we have many to say but if the question is related to me then, I think it is my financial situation which keeps disturbing me. My husband is a sweeper in a hospital and earns very less. Ours is a joint family and we live in my in law’s house which makes our survival a bit hard. We have to look after them, as well as my mother-in-law is an old woman. I work here because of my determination and I am connected to this enterprise from my soul. So, it’s not possible for me to leave it as such.”

Case IV: Jaya was a mid - aged woman with a good dressing style. Her work place was tidy and clean with seven computers. Women were busy entering data and all the files were arranged on their place. This enterprise was situated near the corporation office and KDM which can be one of the reason for its highly organised stature. She was working while the researcher met her and didn’t seem to be noticing and went on entering data while questions were asked to her. She didn’t seem harsh but was reluctant in answering her limitations as she found it difficult to imbibe what limitations actually she has. She looked very confident and busy with her work but spared some time for interaction which lasted for around half-an-hour. To the researcher it looked as if she was never disempowered to become empowered. She was there to make effective use of her idle time.

“I have a nuclear family and my husband is working in a Government job. My daughter is studying in a school. I have nothing much to say about my limitations because I know my job and my family supports me. Initially I had some trouble in adapting to this environment because of the use of computers, software and sometimes the internet also didn't work properly. But I was confident and learned all the required skills within a span of two years. I don't have any particular limitations to be spoken about.”

As stated before, these women were provided with enough workshops and personality development sessions which has helped them in gaining an understanding on their self. During the fieldwork, it was noted that those women who had more than ten years of experience seemed to have gathered more knowledge regarding their limitations. It could related to the fact that they were more involved and experienced than others in terms of participation. Mostly, the leaders of the groups seemed more vocal in describing the factors related to limitations. It again showcases a connection with the involvement of the beneficiaries with the activities of KITEs. An index value of 43 shows a satisfactory state for women.

The knowledge about **rights and responsibilities** creates an inner strength to voice against the denial of rights. It is also essential to maintain social order in society which is possible only by higher level of awareness on the rights and responsibilities to be followed by an individual living in a particular society. Such awareness also enhances the ability to demand their own rights (Sahabi et.al, 2015). Moreover, Fernandez (2009) shows the relationship between women rights and economic development and focuses on a basic economic right for women i.e. property right. Majority of respondents i.e. 93 percent agreed that their awareness on the rights and responsibilities have increased after joining KITEs. Through the group interviews, the researcher could find that their association with KM increased the likelihood of conversing issues related to women especially during the official meetings which were held every year. The lectures and workshops given by Kudumbashree officials also enhanced their knowledge on individual rights and responsibilities. Also, the kind of work they did, which is mainly documenting government data made them aware of the many contemporary schemes meant for

the general public. The social transactions with the government officials facilitated greater understanding of women's rights and duties. A very few of the respondents i.e. 7 percent marked a dissenting note as they found no improvement in their knowledge of the rights and responsibilities meant for them as individuals of this country. While probing into the reason, the researcher could analyse that these were those group of women who couldn't identify the meaning linked to the various activities they did and were still doing by being a part of KITEs. These group of women basically were aloof when it comes to showcase their viewpoint regarding any women issues. They followed what the other group members did without even understanding the significant meaning related to the task performed. To elucidate the above written discussion, the researcher has cited two cases below.

Case V: Meera was her KITE group leader and an executive member of Unnathi Consortium. She was very vocal and friendly when the researcher met her. She spoke a lot about her family and group mates which showed her contentment with what she did. Her enterprise office was a large room looking neat and clean and could represent an ideal type of KITE. They had a separate place for having lunch and another room for keeping all the old files and damaged electronic equipment. Along with her role as an entrepreneur, she also represented her Panchayath pointing an active participation from Kudumbashree in LSG.

“It is essential to know one's rights and responsibilities because it increases our ability to demand our needs. After I got socialized into Kudumbashree, my outlook towards life completely changed and I started to pursue a community worker role in order to help my fellow sisters. All this happened because the vast exposure we received after joining Kudumbashree. The KM officials have worked hard to make us come forward with a noble intention of upgrading women. I have certainly gained a lot and improved my understating of society by becoming a part of this venture.”

Case VI: Jolly was talking to her fellow group mates regarding her family matters when the researcher asked her to talk about her experience. She was a 38 years old middle class woman. Most of the group members of Jolly's group were reluctant in interacting with the researcher and were busy in sharing their family issues with fellow mates. It was literally difficult for the researcher to start a discussion as they looked non-cooperative. Jolly was identified by the researcher because of her active

part in not supporting the researcher to start and continue a discussion. She seemed uncomfortable with the researcher's presence and spoke with a disinclined note.

“I have not attended much of the classes and lectures organised KM because I was busy with certain family issues. I know some of the basic rights and responsibilities but I can't say it has improved due to my participation in KITE. We do data entry and we have a person in our group who attends all the meetings of KM. I am genuinely not interested and don't find any meaning in attending such motivational classes. I know the job and I do it. I read newspaper and that's enough for someone of my age to learn the problems faced by our society and at this age I can't sit long to listen to encouragement lectures.”

As discussed above, it was mainly through their participation in KITE which helped them acquiring more information on this particular factor. But it was identified through study that the respondents especially belonging to the district of Thiruvananthapuram showcased higher awareness when compared to others. It was mainly because of the fact that they belonged to the capital city of the state of Kerala where most of the head offices of most of the Government departments are found. Hence, they were more involved with the political activities and they were the ones who met higher officials for grievance redressals. The index value of 60 shows appropriate condition of women.

Resilience of an individual is determined by their toughness to recover quickly from any difficult circumstances. ICT micro-enterprise sectors also deal with changing trends and policy relating to technology and competition. At such circumstances, it becomes important for an ICT micro-enterprise to become dynamic and evolve in response to changes in the surrounding environment. This makes the capacities and resilience of entrepreneurs and their adaptability important determinants of their success, or even survival (UNCTAD, 2010). This flexibility is essential because it determines their continuation as a group and as an individual in KITE. From the key informant interview, the researcher identified that these women entrepreneurs have worked hard to sustain their livelihood as entrepreneurs. 71 percent of the respondents agreed to have demonstrated resilience while facing difficult situations. Some of the major problems they faced was lack of family support, financial crisis, lack of work, low government support and group

sustenance. These were some of the major hindrances they faced during their journey from the beginning. Some of the groups experienced it more whereas some were lucky enough to sustain without facing much difficulties. 29 percent of the respondents disagreed to have shown the ability of resilience and amongst this most of the respondents i.e. 23 percent were of no opinion because they were unsure of showing any struggle to endure through difficult times. These respondents got family support and their groups were geographically backed up which could enhance and sustain their customer base. Also, the members of such groups might be having strong social networks which capacitates them despite several setbacks. These entrepreneurs opined that their participation in Kudumbashree is another reason for enhancing such qualities. The researcher has included two cases which explains the preceding section.

Case VII: Sunita and her group mates owned a small room for engaging themselves as part of KITE. It looked like an old room with very little space to move around. It was in midst of a city but the building where they had their office was tattered and did not show any signs of public attention. This group was very friendly as they invited to researcher for a discussion and were oral when it came to discuss about their problems.

“Our group suffered mainly because of low customer base which led to financial crisis. This occurred due to the withdrawal of KM in supporting us with the assignments and instead they asked us to create a consortium so that we can become self-reliant. But it takes time to gather social contacts so that the works can be canvassed. There is a huge competition with private agencies as well because they hire more qualified workers. But without waiting much, it was me who decided to print pamphlets and notices with our office number which was distributed in Panchayath, government offices, hospitals and schools so that they know about our existence as a data entry unit.”

Case VIII: Mary is a 36 year old entrepreneur with an established KITE situated very near to the Municipality office. She and her group mates happily received the researcher and went on to discuss their experience. They had huge room with extra small rooms to keep old stuff like damaged electronic equipment, old files and furniture. Everything was arranged and placed properly as it should be.

“We didn’t have much trouble in finding our customers as we are situated near to the municipality office. Also, my family has never stopped me from coming here because they know I love to work on my own. It’s true that when KM stopped supporting us with works, initially it has affected many KITEs but in our case we always got work from Municipality and Panchayath office making us unaffected by it much.”

Through the intensive fieldwork, the researcher discovered that the prime quality they needed was resilience because of the difficult circumstances they had faced and they might face in future which highlights the discussions of UNCTAD (2010). It was visible through their discussions that, at least some of the IT units had strived hard to survive and it was this quality they acquired which made them sustain in the field. When Kudumbashree withdrew from the role of focal actor, it was very difficult for most of the IT units to find data entry works. In such situations, they found out solutions to tackle these problems by creating new networks of their own. Every group had its own leader and it was interesting to observe that these leaders showed exceptional ability of resilience. One of the best example obtained through the fieldwork involves some of the IT units of Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kottayam and Idukki. Again it has to be stated that it was through the relentless efforts of Kudumbashree officials which paved way for acquiring such an ability. The index value of 43 shows a satisfactory situation for the women beneficiaries.

The quality of **perseverance** is essential in times of difficulty because it is this ability that pushes a person to persistently do something despite facing troubles because strong perseverance pays off in performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1989). Even if there is a delay in achieving success, the individual should work hard to acquire the end point. In this study, the researcher could find that 69 percent of the respondents have proved examples of demonstrating endurance in their work. Some of the KITEs especially in Malappuram, Kollam, Wayanad, Thrissur and Idukki were at the verge of closing down and it was due to the relentless efforts of these women entrepreneurs that these units are still working on their own. Through the discussions as well, the researcher identified that these women entrepreneurs have worked hard to make sure of their group’s survival because they found these

units as a place for them to share their feelings, problems and viewpoints. Mallika Das (2000) observed in her study that most common reasons for success of women entrepreneurs is personal qualities such as hard work and perseverance. Most of them saw their KITE as a group effort where they had no obligations, orders, rules and demands to be followed. There was a voluntary compliance from the group members towards their respective group leaders to administer the activities of the group effectively. 12 percent of the respondents disagreed towards accomplishing this quality because they lacked a collective understanding of the common meanings shared by an average group members. Even though there was interdependence between the group members, the totality of the sentiments was not equally understood and shared by all. The researcher describes the disparity in the response by citing two examples.

Case IX: Bindu was a 37 year old woman living in a joint family with her husband, children and in laws. Even though initially he was reluctant to speak about her experience but later on after further discussion she became very friendly with the researcher.

“When KM stopped helping us, it became difficult for us to sustain ourselves. I along with my fellow group mates discussed the solution to this problem and started meeting officials of hospitals, Panchayaths, private agencies in order to create networks which indeed became useful. We are getting some work through Unnathi but it is not enough because we already have our debts to be solved. The room rent, phone bill, internet bill and electricity bill has to be paid through the income we get.”

Case X: Nita belonged to a lower middle class family and showed certain signs of reluctance while interacting with the researcher. Her group mates were very talkative and spoke inexorably while discussing on their experiences. But Nita was a shy and spoke in a low voice which completely deviated from the common response of the group.

“I am thankful that I have a group that looks after me well. I don’t have such abilities but my group has. They always try to motivate me and it is because of them that I am still working in KITE. During hardships most of the problems were handled by my group mates and they came out with a solution to tackle the problem. I have never gone to canvass a task but my fellow group members

have. I work here till noon and then go to my home because I have to look after my children.”

The need to acquire this ability came from the necessity to continue their participation in KITEs. Through the discussions, it was found that these units were like an informal space for them where they could discuss all their issues. It was also a group effort which involved a lot of hard work and determination. Therefore, they did not want to leave such a working space which was devoid of any rules or orders. They worked on the rules which by them which did resemble professional lacking and has been discussed in the previous chapter. The index value of 40 shows a satisfactory condition.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it was not difficult for the researcher to identify the group of unopposed, “natural” group leaders. Even though the group had a nominated group leader, but in every KITE there were one or two group members who displayed an exceptional abilities of **leadership**. In this study, leadership qualities mainly comprised of an individual’s ability to perceive reality, assess self - skills, be responsive to the group’s needs and to know their organization’s need. It was understood through a study (Torri and Martinez, 2014) that micro enterprises can enhance women’s productive capabilities, leadership skills and to some extent social learning abilities. While visiting each group, the researcher could easily identify some women who were very enthusiastic when compared to other group members. The researcher observed that while answering questions on the technical aspects of the unit, its genesis or their feedback on Kudumbashree, there was a peculiar uniform inclination from the group members towards these “natural leaders” which resulted in most of the questions getting answered by them. The researcher was not satisfied with the interaction and even tried to contact these group members personally through telephones, but again the interviews could not last for more than half – an hour and the information acquired was vague. As a result, the data obtained through the interviews depicts that only 17 percent of the respondents strongly agree to have achieved leadership abilities. The data also shows that 33 percent of the entrepreneurs have positively reacted to the question which indicates that these skills are not getting acquired by everyone equally, it may be because of their low cognitive ability or lack of inherited abilities.

This finding was corroborated by interviewing KM officials, as they also supported this finding by saying that there were very less women who actually made effective use of the various motivational and personality development sessions provided to them. The researcher could observe that this disparity in knowledge and function resulted in the formation of two classes which are mutually approving – the “leaders” and the “followers”. There is less class antagonism as the legitimacy originates from the vulnerability of the group and the structural strain is reduced which leads to the power that is sanctioned by the derived need of the group to have an individual with more grasp over the required skills. Some of the entrepreneurs were citing examples of attaining leadership positions in their neighbourhood groups. To illustrate the preceding section, the researcher has provided two cases for reference.

Case X: Veena looked like a happy entrepreneur who found herself lucky for having joined KITE. She was much excited when compared to her fellow group mates to meet the researcher. She immediately started narrating the whole story of her arrival into KITE. But, the researcher could also observe a uniform behaviour from the part of other respondents as they initially looked at her before answering any of the questions. Her group members from were praising her for all the hardships that she took to sustain the group.

“I joined this group at the age of 24 and now I am a successful entrepreneur. It was me who tried to meet the district collector and district mission coordinator to arrange works for my group especially after the formation of Unnathi Consortium. I am an executive member of Unnathi and I attend all the meetings held at the head office of KM. My group mates listen to me and we all share a family feeling with each other. I can never see my group getting split up due to any reasons because now this KITE is my home and soul.”

Case XI: Reshma looked like a shy person and spoke few for any queries. Most of her answers were gestures like nodding head and smiling. Before answering any question, she looked at Veena which prompted the researcher to spend more time in their group in order to observe their transactions. Some of her answers were given by Veena while some answers were forced by Veena to be answered by Reshma.

“I like to work in this group because of Veena and she is the pillar of our unit. She helps to solve everybody’s problem and handles most of the issue in our group. The rules and regulations of our group are also decided by her. I work in this group based on her directions otherwise I would have left this group long back. She provoked me to get engaged in some work so that I could use my idle time and gain some money.”

Such skills were developed as part of their involvement with the activities of Kudumbashree. The respondents also stated that they had attended a huge number of sessions aimed at enhancing their leadership quality and group coordination. Through the interviews it was identified that those women who took part in these activities gained such skills. One of the basic quality observed in these leaders was their knowledge on ICT when compared to others. They seemed outspoken and resourceful in terms of handling their group. They were regarded high in their group. It was an intriguing experience for the researcher when analysis of their activities especially on walking was done in Palakkad district. Some of the group members accompanied the researcher while visiting other IT units and it was very visible that the group members were following their leader who made decisions regarding the path to be taken. There was deliberate attempt observed from the group members as it was a necessity for them to have someone who could lead them the process of production as it reduced the burden of responsibility on others. Some of the top leaders belonged to the district of Kozhikode as they were leading in terms of production which showed their hold over the realm of ICT. The index value of 20 shows an unsatisfactory situation of the women.

Status groups refers to a social stratification where social positions are ranked and organized based on the legal, political and cultural criteria (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Weber defines status position in “Economy and Society” (1920) as the “effective claim to social esteem”. In this study, the notion of status was explored to express and understand about how it is maintained in the institution of family in the case of women who form the universe of this study. The researcher has investigated the question of acquiring **equal status in family** which can be the result of their participation in a Government initiated IT programme. 77 percent of the respondents have positively reacted to this question which indicates that participation in the work force has enhanced their status in family. As most of the

women got married after joining KITE, they could recall the acceptance they got amongst their in-laws. Sharma et.al (2012) in his study stated that entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increase decision making status in the family and society as a whole. The respondents also got support from their own family for joining KITE because of its assured prospect in the future. 23 percent of the entrepreneurs reported negative gain in status which refers to the fact that still many families don't women their required respect. Some of the respondents during group interviews stated that their families were against their participation in the programme where they couldn't get enough financial gain. Some of the respondents were forced to stay away from work due to the dual responsibilities they had to cater to. The researcher has cited two examples illustrating above findings.

Case XII: Seema looked like woman with strong personality as she spoke with effectively every matter that was discussed in her group. She smiled often and answered clearly without hesitation. The researcher could understand her determination and potential during the discussions. She is a graduate in economics and has qualified computer courses which adds up to her credentials.

“I joined KITE before my marriage and I liked the job very much. Before getting married I told my husband that I want to continue the job and readily accepted. Presently, he is working in a shop and we are very happy. In between we had some issues, mainly because of not getting any profit out of this enterprise and he asked me to quit. But I refused because I was sure that someday we will solve all our troubles and start afresh. Now, there are no problems because he understands my interest in this field. He accepts my opinion and respects it.”

Case XIII: Dhanya lived in a joint family and looked firm and attentive during all the discussions of the group. When the researcher asked about her status in her home, initially she looked hesitant in answering but it was her fellow group member who motivated her to speak. After overcoming all the inhibitions, she spoke about her husband and her family. The researcher also supported her because it was necessary to understand her frustration.

“I live in a joint family with my in – laws and if we look from one side, then it is very good to have a joint family but there are a lot

restrictions which are to be faced. My family doesn't like me working here as for the past 3 or 4 years we are not getting any remuneration. Because of this they are forcing to quit the job and look after home. I had full freedom when I had money but now there are certain issues. Being a part of joint family, we need to cater to the demands of other family members as well. My parents don't want me to stop working but my husband and his mother is compelling me to do so."

The researcher also tried to understand their situation before joining KITE. It became clear through the discussions that there has been a huge change in their status after joining KITE. Their association with ICT was seen as a respectful attribute and their participation in one of the largest network of women gained them strength as social beings. Another factor identified was that they were now able to support their families financially, help with the education of siblings and home loans, and facilitate banking and other financial transactions (Maier and Reichert, 2008) which raised their family status. Moreover, they were wage earners and also a part of a Government venture which again added to their status. But still some women could not find much change in their situation due to the already existing patriarchal system. Some of these cases were reported by Muslim respondents of Malappuram district and it is because of the strong and repressive customs followed by the Muslim religion.

If becoming reflexive simulates the process of empowerment then it should also be manifested in the form of social transactions. Hence, it became essential for the researcher to probe into the factors of expression amongst these women entrepreneurs participating in this Government initiated IT programme implemented through SPEM. The following section will elucidate the notion of expression that could facilitate rational behaviour and stabilize organizations.

6.3.2. Expressive

Expressiveness in this study represents an attribute that leads to the enhancement of a sense of belonging amongst individuals as they would exchange their feelings and satisfy their need for care as well as social support (Berman et al., 2002; Manev and Stevenson, 2001; Umphress et al., 2003). As an internal process it secures an individual to believe in their own ability to make decisions and solve

problems. As an external change it is reflected as an augmented capability to promote self – advocacy, act and implement the information, skills and the new resources acquired in the course of the process (Parsons, 1988). The vast opportunities and challenges experienced by these women as entrepreneurs trigger a sense of self- identity making them assertive. This in turn significantly affects the environment associated with them. The Table 6.2 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents on the factor of expressiveness.

Table 6.2. Frequency distribution on Expressive

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index
1.	Communication power has enhanced.	Strongly Agree	109	38.93	68
		Agree	162	57.86	
		No Opinion	09	3.21	
		Disagree	00	00	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
2.	I express my views effectively in any public forum.	Strongly Agree	67	23.93	39
		Agree	101	36.07	
		No Opinion	100	35.71	
		Disagree	07	2.5	
		Strongly Disagree	05	1.79	
3.	I speak for my group in any official meeting.	Strongly Agree	63	22.5	32
		Agree	75	26.79	
		No Opinion	122	43.57	
		Disagree	20	7.14	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
4.	I participate in discussions related to my children's education and marriage.	Strongly Agree	86	30.71	63
		Agree	185	66.07	
		No Opinion	04	1.43	
		Disagree	05	1.79	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
5.	My decisions are valued in my family.	Strongly Agree	40	14.29	38
		Agree	171	61.07	
		No Opinion	35	12.5	
		Disagree	29	10.35	
		Strongly Disagree	05	1.79	

Source: Field work

The **power to communicate** is one of the most important aspect that determines empowerment of an individual. In this study, the researcher is referring to the overt indications from the respondents that express their power over the ability to speak with clarity and assertiveness. This self - analysis of interaction in the social world of these actors can help the researcher to understand whether there is an improvement in their interaction skill and is it caused by their participation in KITEs. Regardless of their work, effective communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. It was noted that women's participation in group activities can enrich their articulating skills (Leach and Sitaram, 2002). To explain the preceding section, the researcher has included two cases.

Case XIV: Manju looked very welcoming from the time researcher contacted her through telephone. She was eagerly waiting to meet the researcher and share her experiences. Her KITE office looked very neat and organized. Her group members also seemed very pleased by the researcher's arrival. They all stopped their work and sat around a table to talk to the researcher. It was Manju who introduced the researcher and the need of the study to all other members. It looked like an ice breaking session as everyone got familiarized very easily and it was all due to her.

"I could communicate with everyone before I joined Kudumbashree but the real change was noticed after my participation in KITE. This job requires a lot of group interactions because it is the group effort which results in efficiency. It can also be the result of the various motivational classes provided by KM to enhance our abilities. Now, after being a part of it for more than 10 years, I have experienced a lot of changes and my words are more assertive as I speak with clarity both at home and at work."

Case XV: Jincy was a middle aged women and looked a bit reserved. Even though she sounded sceptical but it was her who helped the researcher to meet her group mates as well as KITE members of other districts. She spoke less but still gave pertinent answers to all the questions that was asked to her.

"I am a part of this venture because it showcased the idea of work fully owned and run by women. I am a graduate and I always wanted to work in my own firm as an owner. This was made

possible only by participating in KITE. I never had any inhibitions in making myself heard by others. It's true that I have learned managing, organizing and networking through Kudumbashree but this skill to communicate was always there in me. It was me who helped my fellow members to come forward and participate in the various official group discussions that was held as part of our work."

Through the field work, the researcher could find that 97 percent of the respondents affirmatively reacted to the question showing a tremendous effect of group activities on the personalities of these women. Most of them found their participation in Kudumbashree and its activities as the prime reason for the changes they have experienced. Given the training they had undergone, the business opportunities they gained, all these has increased their self - confidence and communication skills, as well as their professional networks and travel opportunities, thus expanding the spectrum of opportunities available to them (Maier and Reichert, 2008). Hence, the respondents could interact assertively with their officials, group mates and family members which made them visible in almost all aspects of their life. Only a very few, 3.21 percent of the entrepreneurs could not find any evident change in their ability to communicate after becoming a part of Kudumbashree. Most of entrepreneurs went onto say that it is this boost in their communication skill which accelerated their process of empowerment. Studies by John (2009) and Kadiyala (2004) showcased similar observations through their studies. But it was very stimulating to note that even this ability was more profound amongst the group leaders when compared to others. An index value of 68 shows a very adequate condition of women.

Through key informants, it was clear that public meetings are an unavoidable part of any government programme as the beneficiaries themselves might have to speak in order to recruit more members into the programme. In this case also, many meetings were held during the initial stage so that the programme could be launched state wide. For propagating the vision and mission of KITE, the members were made to address public meetings. Hence, the skill to **express oneself in any public forum** is an essential attribute while considering a Kudumbashree entrepreneur. They were supposed to represent KITE and were made to publicise the agenda of KM in Grama Sabha, NHGs and Panchayath meetings. When queries

regarding this attribute were raised amongst women entrepreneurs, the researcher found that 60 percent of them could confidently convey themselves in front of others. Such group associations of women could make them more confident in banking, and money transactions, they improved their skill in the co-ordination of meetings and communication skill and public speaking skill also improved (Kalyani and Seena, 2012) The researcher has cited two examples claimed from the field works.

Case XVI: Aruna was a graduate and had a family that supported her always. Her mother –in – law took care of her children even when she stays away from home while attending certain meetings of KM. She readily understood the aims of the researcher and the significance of this study. She came forward to speak about her group and its members. It was a surprise for the researcher as they even arranged a lunch together in order to facilitate further discussions.

“While completing my graduation, I had a fear whether I will waste my life just by sitting at home. But soon I joined computer coaching classes commenced by our Panchayath. Thereafter, I never had to look back as they absorbed all the ten of us into KITE. It was a new venture and seemed like having a lot of opportunities, which it did have. As part of it, we had to attend many workshops, classes and motivational sessions where we played games and some of us for the first time took a mic in our hand to talk and face the public. It is because the various efforts undertaken by the KM officials that has upgraded and uplifted us and made us stand where we are now.”

Case XVII: Jenny looked reserved and a bit sceptical when the researcher arrived amongst her group mates. She was welcoming but there were a lot of confusions on her face which was noticed by the researcher. She answered reluctantly for almost all the questions and didn't participate effectively in the group discussions as well. She tried to conceal herself behind the group leader and was motivated several times by the researcher herself to reflect on some of the questions.

“I couldn't attend most of the programmes myself because I had certain family issues to be taken care of. My family is a bit conservative and they didn't allow me to travel from here to Thiruvananthapuram in order to participate in the workshops. Also, in our group there are other able people who can talk and take decisions much better than me. I never had to worry about

facing the public as these people did it in the most suitable way and I supported them from the background.”

Through group discussions, the researcher understood that these abilities were acquired by them due to their constant interaction with the KM officials. The various personality enrichment sessions and workshops paved way for them to build this skill so that these entrepreneurs could in future become best examples for attracting more members into the field of KITEs. One of the former official of KM told the researcher that it was a process of uplifting these women from their present stages because to work and sustain in an IT field requires some essential skills like communication, organization and management. Due to the awareness of the public grievances and improvement of the communication skill by the involvement in SHGs, women were able to raise public issues (Shidaganal, 2009). On the contrary, there were a few of the respondents (4.29 percent) who disagreed with having developed any such abilities that could help them to address public meetings. Along with these meagre quantity, the researcher found 36 percent of the respondents who had no opinion with regard to the above stated quality. While probing into the factors responsible for this disparity in achieving the ability to communicate in a public space through interviews and discussions, the researcher observed that it was especially due to the inability to attend and understand the classes taken by the officials with the intention of enhancing their personality traits. Some of them were disinterested while some others were dependent on the strong members of their group which reduced the possibility of equal distribution of responsibilities. But still most of them opined that it was their participation in Kudumbashree which aided them to at least speak for themselves. A study by Devika and Thampi (2007), illustrated that Kudumbashree promote public discussions amongst women to ensure that the possibilities associated with these institutions are realised in full.

To represent one's group is another factor which was analysed by the researcher because it is an important attribute that can showcase the ability of these entrepreneurs. In all the official meetings held at the KM office, the representatives from these enterprises meet and discuss their future projects. During these meetings they need to **speak for the group** and bring forward the overall status of the projects completed by them. The key informants also highlighted the importance of this

action as it succours them to get socialized into the structure of the organization. When asked about their representation for the group they belonged, 49 percent of the respondents immediately affirmed their responsibility for their group and most of them saw it as their duty to speak for the group they belonged to. The researcher has included two cases in order to show the disparity in the responses.

Case XX: Sharon was her group leader and also an executive member of Unnathi Consortium. Her power over her members and her clarity of thoughts were the prime factors that got her noticed by the researcher. She readily commenced a group discussion which facilitated the researcher to gather data from the members effectively. She looked smart in her saree and spoke like an experienced entrepreneur.

“I have always attended the meetings organized by the KM because it is essential to let them know our views and thoughts on the projects undertaken by us. My family doesn’t support me much but I take it as my duty to meet the officials of Kudumbashree. While obtaining a contract or an assignment and also to provide technical training for a software, the authorities contact us to meet at the head office situated in Thiruvananthapuram. Even though it is difficult to travel such a long distance, we communicate with our fellow members in the same district so as to go in a group. It is this group support which motivates us to strive harder for the betterment of our group.”

Case XXI: Sandhya was working at the hospital kiosk as part of KITE. The researcher met her with the help of Sharon. She was friendly but reserved and restrained. She didn’t talk much especially due to the rush but did respond in a very few words. She was appointed here by Sharon and hence, behaved very respectfully on her arrival.

“In our group, it is Sharon who does all the talking and our job is to listen and obey her. She is very active amongst us and also dictates our terms to the KM officials as well. We like to do what she asks us to do and she is the one who can represent our group more effectively. I sometimes accompany her to attend the meetings but my work is basically as an assistant. I can’t speak like her so, I leave the job of articulation to her. I do have made a try to do the same but it took a lot of work to make myself ready for that simple activity. So it is best to leave the work of speaking for those who are good at it.”

The group discussions explicitly expressed the dedication of these members and again helped the researcher in identifying some “natural leaders” who took it as their liability to work hard for their group. A very few of them (7 percent) of the respondents disagreed with the statement and the researcher could easily identify such people because of their gestures and interactions. They lacked basic interaction abilities and spoke after their leaders. They didn’t seem to have answers to any random questions asked to them and behaved sceptically. Adding to this, the researcher through field work could also identify 44 percent of the respondents who had no opinion on their ability to represent their group. These women usually depended on their family and the group members in order to sustain their job as a KITE member. Some of them has family issues and were not allowed to travel far for official meetings where as others didn’t find any meaning in discovering the chance to speak for the group they created. Some of the members from the units of Kozhikode, Palakkad, and Thiruvananthapuram showed equal interest in speaking for their group.

Expressing one’s viewpoint in family is as important as doing the same for a work. Here, the researcher has tried to understand the ability of these entrepreneurs in **articulating matters regarding their children’s education and marriage**. As mothers they are also responsible to educate their children and help them in deciding their future. The quality of expression is fully complete if it is practiced both at work and at home. Through the field work, the researcher could find that 3 percent of the respondents didn’t have enough freedom to express their opinion on their children’s future. Among these, 1.43 percent had no opinion regarding this particular power because they were either not sure about how this power could be manifested in case of their children or they didn’t have the power to decide and the decisions were taken by someone else. Following are the two cases obtained from field study.

Case XXII: Rama was a 37 year old woman and her two children were studying in a nearby school. She looked enthusiastic while discussing her children’s future. Her husband had his own shop and they lived as a nuclear family. Rama was very particular that her children should opt for the best higher education based on their wish. It was because of this dream that she continued her journey in KITE.

“I am very particular about my children and I make sure that they are very comfortable in discussing their future with me. We have a nuclear family and my husband runs a shop. We don’t have any financial strains but both of us couldn’t complete our studies as we wished. Hence, we both are working hard to provide a better education and life for our children. I love to work in KITE because of the freedom we can enjoy there. It is like moving from one home to another as the flexible working hours and understanding team members can make you feel happy. I discuss about them with my friends and with my family which reinsures my role as their mother.”

Case XXIII: Daya was extremely in rush when she met the researcher. She was heading to the Panchayath office for the purpose of entering data from government files. She looked preoccupied but still helped the researcher to interact with her. She belonged to a joint family and her husband worked as a plumber. Her two daughters were studying in government school and she was very reluctantly discussing matters regarding their future and seemed ambiguous of her role in deciding the future of her own children.

“I got married soon after I completed my pre-degree. It was my husband’s family who wanted me to join for a computer course so as to get some job. My children are studying now and there are more opportunities available for them than it used to be in our times. They are girls which adds more responsibility on us because we have to get them married by giving a decent amount of gold. Marriage is a very important aspect of a woman’s life and everything else can come later. Let their future decide their destiny and we will fulfil our prime responsibility. My husband and his elder brother decides most of the matters regarding all the children in our house and I am sure they won’t do anything that would affect them negatively.”

Most of the women who responded negatively lived in a joint family which illustrates the power of other family members on the decision making ability of these women. 97 percent of these entrepreneurs positively responded indicating that a large section of the women from KITE are able to effectively exercise power over the decisions representing their children. Empowerment of society and enrichment of family which could be attained through empowering women (Nigam, 2001). Hence, Kudumbashree seeks to empower women and through this process bring prosperity to the family (Oommen, 2008). It was observed through the interviews

and discussions that this capability to make decisions was acquired by them as part of the process of gaining wide awareness regarding the social world around them and the availability of opportunities that can be utilized through the right type of education. Some of them during discussions even went onto say that their children formed the prime reason for them to participate and continue in KITEs as they could give suitable time for family matters as discussed in the previous chapter. The working hours were flexible and this could reinforce their attention on family and children.

As stated above, expressing one's viewpoint in their family is very important because it is this attribute that determines the essence of the bonding between its members. But it is not just the verbal or non-verbal expression that matters but it is the value procured by this social act of the actor. Hence, the researcher in this study has also tried to analyse actor's self-realisation on whether their **decisions are valued** in the most intimate domestic group of people related to one another called the family. According to Tucker (2003), individual empowerment requires community involvement, developing skills, taking decisions and solving problems independently. The data showed that 75 percent of the respondents positively stated that their involvement in the family discussions are valued by the family members. Their perspectives were respected and was requested by their relatives. Here also, the members were speaking high of their association with Kudumbashree because being a part of a venture put forward by this mission made them self-reliant on most of the essential aspects required to survive. Their participation in women led group also enhanced their opportunity to interact and share the problems faced by them making it a medium to exchange personal issues. In a study by Ram et.al (2013) done on women entrepreneurs, it was found that women working by themselves had an adequate decision making ability. Two cases are provided in the following section to illustrate the facts observed by the researcher.

Case XXIV: Sara was at her home and at first looked sceptical when the researcher met her in order to disclose the objectives of her study. But after understanding the relevance of the study, she immediately arranged a visit for the researcher at her KITE. Though the unit looked less like an office and more like a house but all the

members of the unit were very friendly towards the researcher. They had an informal relation amongst each other which made them discuss matters like they were at home. Everyone knew each other's background which reflected the depth of their relationship or maybe because of such a long association with each other, they had developed an informal atmosphere at their office. Two women had come with their children who were playing on the computers which absolutely was not what the researcher expected from an IT enterprise.

“Though I live in a joint family, I have never experienced any kind of forcing from the male heads. It is true that we have to do certain adjustments but it was also never demanded by them. I made the decisions myself and did what was suitable to the situation. Whenever a matter comes for discussion, my husband and in-laws always ask for my opinion because they trust me. They know that I run an IT enterprise and they are confident that I can make decisions on my own. They also know that it is not easy to survive in such a competent environment but I have always stood as an example in front of them. I am saving money for my children's betterment and I decide what should be done with that amount. Even my husband cannot persuade me if I have made up my mind to do something that I wish. I attained all these abilities because of my long association with working in such an enterprise.”

Case XXV: Lekha was a married woman living with her husband and her two children. She was silent most of the time and responded vaguely most of the time. She was associated with her group for more than years but her gestures and reaction to most of the questions made it evident to the researcher that she was indirectly linked to her group without handling many responsibilities as done by some of the group mates. She either smiled or looked at others before answering anything and moreover, most of her replies were one word answers.

“I am happy that I work for KITE. My husband is asking me to stop working because we are not getting any output in terms of revenue. In my home, most of the decisions are taken by husband and I like to listen to him. We don't discuss any problematic matters in-depth because I trust his actions. He manages all the financial matters and I assist him.”

The researcher also found that around 12 percent of the respondents did not share the respect gained by other members in their family and the rest remained

silent. While probing into the factors that has affected their visibility at home even after becoming an entrepreneur, it was understood that they had learned very less from their association with Kudumbashree. Also, they were forced by the patriarchal system still existing in our society, to follow the rules dictated by the male heads of the family and these women were not enough enriched by their experiences in KITE to defend themselves and come forward. Even if women do most of the work, men control most large-scale income activities (Chen, 1986), decision-making power and ownership of household resources, on the principle that “men shield everything”. Amongst them, some of the respondents remained quiet on their experiences, some gave vague responses and others frankly accepted the constrained role of a woman. Such situations were mostly found in joint families whereas women enjoyed more space and her decisions got valued in case of nuclear family.

6.3.3. Futuristic

The future oriented aspect of empowerment depicts the creation of a constructive self which encourages these women entrepreneurs to have a positive attitude towards their work. It relates to the notion of gradual development through acquiring knowledge which stimulates their desire to dream high for their children and for themselves. It also represents the proclivity towards upgrading information on new technological developments which is also an essential aspect to survive in the field of ICT services. The Table 6.3 below showcases the frequency distribution of the women respondents with respect to the aspect called futuristic.

Table 6.3. Frequency distribution on Futuristic

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I am capable of handling new responsibility.	Strongly Agree	53	18.93	24
		Agree	90	32.14	
		No Opinion	89	31.79	
		Disagree	37	13.21	
		Strongly Disagree	11	3.93	
2.	I have a positive	Strongly Agree	161	57.5	67
		Agree	80	28.57	

	attitude towards work.	No Opinion	11	3.93	
		Disagree	27	9.64	
		Strongly Disagree	01	0.36	
3.	I update my skills and knowledge based on new technological developments.	Strongly Agree	28	10	4
		Agree	71	25.36	
		No Opinion	85	30.36	
		Disagree	86	30.71	
		Strongly Disagree	10	3.57	
4.	I know to operate a computer.	Strongly Agree	63	22.5	61
		Agree	217	77.5	
		No Opinion	00	00	
		Disagree	00	00	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
5.	I know to use a mobile phone.	Strongly Agree	39	13.93	53
		Agree	218	77.86	
		No Opinion	23	8.21	
		Disagree	00	00	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
6.	Can provide technical support to my children.	Strongly Agree	59	21.07	52
		Agree	197	70.36	
		No Opinion	07	2.5	
		Disagree	10	3.57	
		Strongly Disagree	07	2.5	

Source: Field work

The willingness to **shoulder new responsibilities** indicates a rise in self – confidence. It is the awareness in the latent inherent content of an individual which motivates them to handle new objectives in their life. After getting knowledge on one’s own abilities, they then try to achieve higher levels which is an aftermath this self-awareness. In this study, 51 percent of the entrepreneurs unhesitatingly assured the researcher that they could handle new opportunities if asked to. The drive and dedication to do something new in their life and work was very much evident through the discussions. During the discussions, researcher could find that even though they had the intention to innovate new project as an attempt to change the

pattern of work that they are following but they lacked an effective leadership under a single umbrella. They wanted to get the support of KM and most of them were not satisfied with the formation of *Unnathi Consortium* which is again an attempt to unify and bring all the units together. The researcher has provided two cases demonstrating the preceding discussion.

Case XXVI: Lathika was an active member of her group as described by her fellow group mates. She liked working at her unit because according to her, it was like her second home where she could meet some of her close friends. Her ability in entering data was much appreciated by the group mates because she was very efficient when compared to the rest of the members.

“I could do my work efficiently because I love the job I am into. I have attended almost all the classes, especially the personality development sessions because through them we could understand ourselves and become aware of our capabilities. These classes have boosted up my confidence and motivated me to achieve more in the field I work in. I dedicated myself in learning data entry and now I am an experienced data entry operator. We learned to do business and also, to canvass customers with the help of KM.”

Case XXVII: Jenni was an experienced data entry operator but the researcher could understand that her functions as an entrepreneur were limited to the computer kept in front of her. She didn't involve in the discussion held in her group and kept herself busy with the work. She didn't speak much about anything but kept her eyes directed towards the computer. It was evident that she saw these conversations as an utter waste of time and useless or maybe she was sceptical. When asked about her opinion, the researcher heard these final words:

“My job is to do data entry and I am busy with completing a given job. I have not much to say about this. We are struggling as we have not yet received our payment for the work we have done some six months before. I don't want to undergo any headache by taking more responsibilities.”

17 percent of the respondents disagreed with having attained any abilities to handle new responsibilities and the rest had no opinion on any kind of development experienced by them with regard to this field. The reason identified through interviews and discussions were that these group of entrepreneurs remained

usually dormant or undemonstrative when it comes to perform. While the researcher attended an official feedback meeting of a project, the KM authorities criticized certain groups who did not complete the task of documenting and digitizing the field data of a Government survey on Disability. It was understandable that some of the members lacked any professional ethics which is a required attribute for the development of one's skill in the field they work. The key-informants also stated that the various workshops and classes provided to these women was again done with the intention of making them capable in confronting new challenges. Such a capability was seen amongst those groups especially from Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and some units of Malappuram which earned comparatively high. It was understood that their motivation on experimenting with their capabilities was related to the financial capital they gained through the data entry works. Again, a distinctive nature was observed amongst the leaders who were ready to undertake any risks which shows the impact of their participation in Kudumbashree. The index value of 24 shows an disappointing situation for the respondents.

An individual's attitude towards their activities plays a major role in making them do it effectively or not. In this case also, the researcher has tried to uncover whether these entrepreneurs have **positive outlook towards work** in which they were involved for the past 16 years. It is true that most of them joined KITE due to some of the major needs discussed earlier in this chapter. But all of them had one matter in common which is their interest in work. Soon after joining KITE, they could understand the relevance of a job and the income attained through it. It made them producers which paved way for them to gain the means of production as well as the relations of production. 86 percent of the respondents affirmed that they have attained positive attitude towards work after joining KITE. The researcher has cited two examples from the respondents.

Case XXVIII: Mary was a middle aged woman and looked as if she was very rich especially due to the long ornaments she was wearing on her. She was introduced as the President of Unnathi consortium. She looked confident but initially remained constrained while interacting with the researcher. Her unit and its members were known for its efficiency and professionalism. They were experienced, smart, fast

and dynamic when it came to accepting any project provided by the KM. She was friendly, dominant and powerful in her words. She said that it was her participation in KITE which enhanced her abilities, which was an exceptional achievement from the part of KITE.

“My husband is a government employee and I have two children. My daughter got married and my son is pursuing his engineering degree. I entered KITE after my marriage and from beginning itself I was interested to work in a place where I can have all the freedom to manage the activities. KITE is most apt place where I can showcase my capabilities. My outlook towards work was positively encouraged by the KM officials from the initial years. They found the talent in me and motivated me to take care of my unit which I am still doing. Now, I am the all Kerala President of KITE, which again is the result of the various good deeds I have done safeguard and secure my group.”

Case XXIX: Sudha looked miserable when she was visited by the researcher. She kept silent during all the discussions and sat in a corner with her computer kept in front of her. She was disinterested in doing the work and tried to concentrate on the thoughts exchanged between the researcher and the group members. The researcher noticed her gestures and met her in person with the intention of unveiling some issues faced by her as part of experiences.

“I started working for my family as they forced me to join KITE. I wanted to study more but due to lack of money, my parents sent me to work. There was some benefits as we got good and reasonable amount of income as part of our work during the initial years. But as time passed, we are getting collapsed because there is no revenue produced for us even after doing a huge work. I am afraid that soon our unit will close down.”

Through discussions, it was revealed that these changes were the result of the several positive experiences they have undergone after becoming a part of such a gender specific programme. Most of them couldn't even think of a future without KITEs because it has become a prime portion of their daily activities. A very few, i.e. 10 percent of these entrepreneurs responded negatively which can be the result of the various setbacks they might have experienced against their expectations. The rest of the respondents which are around 4 percent were of no opinion as they either hesitated to answer or couldn't make out their attitude towards the work done by them. The researcher would like to take this as a negative response because the

inability to explain one's condition even after experiencing it for a long time cannot be accepted as a silence. These entrepreneurs may not be satisfied with the kind of work done by them for they might have had more anticipations towards their capability. Mostly those respondents who were above 40 years of age showed content in their activities as they lacked any high expectations whereas those who were in the age group of 30 – 35 were highly anxious regarding their situation.

If a person has to survive in a competent sector like IT, it is essential to **update the recent technological developments** happening in and round us. This factor is also applicable to these entrepreneurs because the field they are in changing everyday due to the mass developments, innovations and inventions happening in the world. The power to gain knowledge and also to train oneself to sustain in this competitive field requires rigorous efforts from the side of the government and also from the entrepreneurs who actually work in the field. KITE functions with the support of KM and hence, is fully dependent on its officials when it comes to training and coaching. They were given the required software training if the job or the assignment needed it. The researcher has cited two cases obtained from the field.

Case XXX: Suhana was the group member who picked up the call for her group. She belonged to an orthodox Muslim family and was married. She worked at her KITE for more than ten years and this enterprise resembled other IT enterprises like Akshaya. There were three members working when the researcher reached them. Their office was very near to the District and Sessions Court which paved to receive some works.

“I am the youngest in my family and I did graduation in English. Before completing my graduation, I got married and shifted to this place. Then I joined for computer coaching and soon after that I started my work as a KITE member. We get training and workshops before starting any new project and it helps us to become aware of the required software. Apart from that I try to get more knowledge regarding new innovations in software field by browsing. All these are done at the enterprise itself because I don't get much time at home.”

Case XXXI: Neethu was busy with her data entry but tried to give responses to most of the questions asked by the researcher. She started laughing when the researcher asked her on the home works done by her in order to upgrade her technical

knowledge. This aroused the curiosity of the researcher because through her response it could be understood that she took this matter very casually and didn't even think about the relevance of this activity.

“You should applaud for all the works I have done in the future and I am still doing them even at the age of 40. Now, at this age I can't do more work for gathering technical knowledge. It is not required anymore as we have survived till this day without any home works and I am sure we will survive if everything goes well.”

Only 35 percent of these entrepreneurs were interested in updating themselves with the latest development in the field of IT. They either depended on the officials of KM or people in the social networks to help them gather knowledge about the same. Some of them also found help from their children who now study IT at their schools. They were experienced in data entry but the major obstacle before them was their ignorance on emerging changes. On the contrary, 64 percent of the respondents responded negatively which shows a serious problem of unawareness faced by these women working in Kerala's first gender specific government IT programme especially created for the downtrodden women folk of Kerala. Through discussions the researcher could understand that they were either not interested in doing some extra homework or thought that they have lost the age of learning. They saw themselves as the most experienced data entry operators in Kerala but still lagged behind other government IT organizations like *Akshaya* and C-DAC because of one of this reason. These women lack an organized body that would make sure of their upgrade in terms of IT. Amongst these women, 30 percent of them were silent and gave vague, ambiguous answers which didn't fit into any of the other categories. As stated in the previous chapter, it was due to this lag which motivated them to hire young female college students who would handle this as a part time job.

The most important aspect of data entry job is to have a minimum **knowledge of computer**, the major tool required for this purpose. If a group has to survive in this field, it should also learn computer in the best possible way. In this study, the researcher has tried to uncover their responses on this aspect as well. Undoubtedly 100 percent of the respondents positively reacted to this question

which is a necessary factor to ensure that everybody has obtained equal access to the knowledge provided by the KM. But the researcher was doubtful on this data as it showed an idealistic situation. The researcher has added an example from the field.

Case XXXII: Namitha was sitting with her child when the researcher reached her KITE. They were chatting casually and soon included the researcher in their discussions. The researcher was astonished as Namitha was confidently doing her work and attending her child both at the same time. This demonstrated her experience and proficiency in this field. By discussing with other group members, the researcher understood that they knew to handle hardware issues of the computer as well. All these trainings were provided by the KM officials to make sure of making them self-reliant.

“I have more than ten years of experience in data entry and even before joining this unit I had undergone computer coaching which helped me gain proficiency fast. We got training from the head office which adds up to our potential. We are also the most experienced data entry operators you can find in Kerala. We do the data entry in Malayalam as well which is rarely found in Kerala.”

The key informants also spoke of their role in enhancing the technical ability of these women. They were given hardware and software before and during the whole process of getting socialized into *Kudumbashree*. These officials preferred computer literate women because of the nature of the job. These entrepreneurs have more than ten years of experience in this field which also adds up to their level of technical awareness, especially in the field of data entry. While probing deep into the factors, the researcher understood that these respondents were mainly aware of the basic use of a computer apart from any complex applications. But as stated above, most of the women are not enthusiastic in learning new technical progress in the field of IT and hence, they are uninspired and unconscious about the huge gap existing between them and other agencies. The enthusiasm was prevalent in case of the leaders who wished to enhance their technical skills.

Mobile phones are now found everywhere and to survive in this fast moving world, individuals are **supposed to know how to use a mobile phone** in

order to communicate rapidly. The works done by these women also requires the use of this tool because they need to maintain a social network efficient enough to provide them with required guidance and support both in the form information and work. For them, the best way to communicate with each other is a mobile phone because it can enhance their mobility as they can take to all the places they go. Most of the respondents i.e. 92 percent of them had a mobile phone of their own and that too bought from their own income. This question itself seemed irrelevant for them as according to them in this fast changing world, one has to be aware of these tools and there use. Some of these women were confidently making use of the latest apps like Whatsapp and Facebook in order to strengthen their networks. The following are the two cases obtained from the field work.

Case XXXIII: Susha was in her late 30s and was seen carrying a mobile phone in her left hand all the time. She didn't keep it down and always peeped into it as if studying it. She was getting a lot of calls while interacting with the researcher. Some of the calls were from government offices while some others were from her friends and relatives.

“It has become difficult to live without this small device. This tool helps me to stay in contact with my family wherever I go. I feel secure and safe if I travel with a mobile because I can take it anywhere. Most of the deals are made from phone as we contact our customers and make sure that the data entry work is obtained only by our enterprise.”

Case XXXIV: Savitha was in her late 40s and came much after the researcher arrived. She went to pay her electricity bill and then directly came to the enterprise. She had a small phone which looked like an old model but still she was happy for having acquired a mobile phone out her own income. She was a widow and lived with her only son who was studying in a nearby college.

“I use this mobile especially to contact my son as he is studying in college and roams around much with his friends. I am not aware of the other aspects of this mobile phone because the best thing that I can do with it is to receive a call done by someone else. I call only my son and I don't even send any messages through this device. I can't say whether I know a mobile phone perfectly.”

A few of them used their mobile phone for the purpose of communicating their friends, relatives and family. These women might have to travel far for the purpose of official matters and this tool helped them to stay in contact with their family during all these time. A very few of the entrepreneurs, i.e. around 8 percent of them were not sure of their proficiency in using this tool and answered ambiguously because they used their mobile only to receive a call. Most of these women were in their late 40s and hence, their age can be a factor which increases the complexity of the mobile phones.

It is the duty of parents to properly nurture and mould the skills of their children as they are the architects who design the future of a country. They can take care of the nation in future if these children are provided with effective guidance. Even after being a literate mother, most of the women lacked the inner urge and ability to guide and render the needed **support to children**. This study also tried to analyse this powerful role of women because it is one of the characteristic of a capable women. The group discussions and the interviews enlightened the researcher on the real situation as most of the women i.e. 91 percent of them helped their children by providing them technical support. These discussions between them and their children were basically on the subjects as well as on the gadgets that get familiar amongst them. The researcher has cited two cases in order to show the disparity.

Case XXXV: Deepthi was a graduate and a proud entrepreneur. Through her words, the researcher could understand the depth of her knowledge especially related to her work. She was very vocal and enthusiastic demonstrating an ideal characteristics of an able women. She had two children and lived with her mother-in law. While she went for her work, it was her mother – in – law who took care of her kids. As the working hours are flexible, she managed to come home early before her children could come after school.

“I have a supportive family and we share house works. My mother –in – law helps me with the culinary activities and she is a boon for me. I come home early for my kids and during the evening time, I sit with them for around 1 hour in order to help them in their studies. I was good in my studies and all these capabilities do help me in guiding them properly.”

Case XXXVI: Shabana was very shy when she first met the researcher. She kept on looking at the computer screen while interacting with the researcher. She had qualified matriculation and soon after that got married limiting her scope for further studies. She did the activities of KITE under the guidance of her group leader.

“I live in a joint family and as we know, women in a Muslim family has to obey certain rules which limit their access to freedom. I managed to obtain a job here and I am still continuing even after a lot of challenges. I get minimum time at home and usually I am busy with the household activities. Therefore, I don’t get enough time to sit with my children and help them in their studies.”

As these women are proficient with respect to the electronic tools, it develops their chances to clarify doubts of their children on these devices. A very small group of them which accounts to 6 percent of the respondents negatively responded to this statement showing the difficulties they have in imparting knowledge to their children. They were either educationally backward or lacked enough time to sit with their children. Most of the women belonging to this category were in a joint family as these women were preoccupied with the household chores. But women who were active in their group liked to sit with their children and help them in studies. It also shows the confidence they gained through their activities which creates a self - assurance within them to support their children.

6.3.4. Social capital and Mobility

The concept of social capital was originally devised by James Coleman to describe the relation existing in families and communities that lead to exert a strong influence on the educational achievement of an individual (Scott and Marshall, 2009). In this study, it can be described in the words of Putnam as a ‘bonding’ capital which leads to a network of relations between different types of people (Baron, 2000). It draws attention to the sociability and connectedness constructed through mutual acquaintance between individuals sharing the same social space. Mobility, on the other hand explains the potent ability of an individual to move freely beyond their social space. This possessed capability can be the result of enhanced social capital or a need of work that can prompt them to move away from

their location. The Table 6.4 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents with respect to social capital and mobility.

Table 6.4. Frequency distribution on Social Capital and Mobility

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I have the ability to organize/mobilize women's activity.	Strongly Agree	42	15	30
		Agree	164	58.57	
		No Opinion	07	2.5	
		Disagree	54	19.29	
		Strongly Disagree	13	4.64	
2.	I have strong networks with my friends and family.	Strongly Agree	87	31.07	61
		Agree	179	63.93	
		No Opinion	05	1.79	
		Disagree	09	3.21	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
3.	I participate in social networking.	Strongly Agree	69	24.64	41
		Agree	152	54.29	
		No Opinion	10	3.57	
		Disagree	40	14.29	
		Strongly Disagree	09	3.21	
4.	I travel long distance for work.	Strongly Agree	105	37.5	41
		Agree	102	36.42	
		No Opinion	07	2.5	
		Disagree	51	18.21	
		Strongly Disagree	15	5.36	
5.	I stay late night to complete the given task.	Strongly Agree	78	27.86	43
		Agree	143	51.07	
		No Opinion	03	1.07	
		Disagree	51	18.21	
		Strongly Disagree	05	1.79	
6.	I have the liberty to visit my friends and relatives.	Strongly Agree	69	24.64	54
		Agree	190	67.86	
		No Opinion	03	1.07	
		Disagree	13	4.64	
		Strongly Disagree	05	1.79	

Source: Field Work

The ability to **organise or mobilise women** adds momentum to the empowerment initiatives of women as it results in building the leadership and management skills of the respondents. It also enhances the self – confidence of these women because of the social relationship extracted from the voluntary compliances resulting out of these associations. It legitimizes them to exercise power over these mobilized women to perform specific functions. The efforts entailed in such attempts can lead to enhanced contribution for the personal growth of an individual. Majority underlined that they can gather women when need arises. 74 percent of the respondents positively responded indicating the outcome of participation in Kudumbashree. The researcher has cited two examples from field to demonstrate the disparity.

Case XXXVII: Karthika was very vocal and active in introducing her fellow group members to the researcher. She was a political leader of her locality and had many contacts that added to her social capital. She joined Kudumbashree during the age of 20 and after that, she worked amongst these women to understand their needs and problems. She is the one who motivated her friends to join together in order to start an IT enterprise.

“I was young when I came to Kudumbashree and I have never regretted my participation in such women activities. I am known in my locality for the works I have done for my fellow sisters and I could do all these activities only because of the rigorous training provided to us by KM. they were keen in making us capable of dealing with all the hindrances that women can face during their life.”

Case XXXVIII: Saritha was very coy from the beginning itself and sat reluctantly while researcher was interacting with her. She could not give her own outlook on most of the statements. She was at her fellow members and smiling for most of the questions, may be because she had a lot of inhibitions which was not yet vanquished.

“I do the work asked by me to do. I like to come here and work because all are my friends here and it does not look like a formal office space. I don’t have a lot of official contacts because it is handled by our group leader. I am in Kudumbashree for more than ten years and I have handled leadership positions only because of the help and support of my fellow members. ”

All these women belong to NHGs and through these groups they created a large network of fellow women workers in order to effectively mobilize the resources made available for them. KM also caters to these needs as through key informants the researcher could understand that these women were given enough group activities to reduce inhibitions. After participating in such workshops for long time, it becomes a part of their personality to meet and interact with people. It acts as a mechanism to collect maximum resources in the form of material and human for assuring the long run of their working units. On the contrary, 24 percent of them disagreed with mastering this ability to amass women. The reasons that the researcher could identify through discussions and interviews was that most of these women failed to achieve leadership abilities may be because of their disinterest or lack of self - confidence. These women liked to work under other leaders and did not like to take risks which symbolises their inhibitions and disability in conquering impediments. It was noted through the study that those women who had more than ten years of experience showcased exceptional abilities of organizing groups when compared to other group members.

In this study, the researcher has tried to analyse the social network of these respondents which represents a system made up of significant others like friends and families who constantly interact with each other building strong relationships. In order to become a part of the society an individual should have a **strong network of friends and families**. 95 percent of the respondents positively responded to the question which shows that majority of these women have secured good relations with their family and friends. A very few of the respondents negatively responded to the query which turned out to be around 3 percent of the KITE members. Along with these individuals, the researcher even found that a very few i.e. 2 percent of the respondents had no opinion regarding their participation in such social networks. The researcher has provided two cases to showcase the differences.

Case XXXIX: Tara was in her late 30s and had two school going children. She was an active member of her group and kept herself busy with the works of the IT enterprise where she worked. She was very talkative and could easily mingle with any group. She readily started interacting with the researcher in order to understand

the prime motive behind the visit. She was enthusiastic and inquisitive to know the whereabouts of the research.

“I travel a lot for the purpose of Kudumbashree and for KITE. In every month I might have to attend at least two executive meeting which makes me to stay away from home. During all these years my children were looked after by my families. My in-laws also took the responsibility of taking care of my children. This has always made me to focus completely on my work without any fear.”

Case XXXX: Hari was an experienced data entry operator and worked at a hospital kiosk run by KITE. She liked to work at this place and away from her fellow group members. She was very reluctant while interacting with the researcher and it was difficult even to start a conversation.

“I like to work here on my own and after work I go back to my home. My son is studying in a college and I usually don’t travel much so that he is left alone.”

It became clear through the discussions and interviews that they were closely related to their families and friends because they mostly depended on them when they were in crucial situations. Almost all the women are married and they have a minimum of two children to look after. During the time of official meetings, they might have to travel and stay at a different place for more than a week and all these time they leave their children either with their families or their friends. This indicates a strong dependence of these women on their significant others. Women who disagreed having strong networks with their friends and families were mostly reluctant in answering the question. Through their group mates, the researcher found that these women had some family issues, some were divorced and some had children who were old enough to look after themselves. Some of them stayed away from the group due to certain internal conflicts. It was undoubtedly their participation in *Kudumbashree* which had made them good social beings.

Social networking represents a system of social actors such as individuals and organizations which lead effective knowledge transmission. In order to work in an enterprise where a group of individuals put their group effort to produce an output requires a minimum interaction at least with the group they work with. It

also showcases the use of various social networking sites and apps that can help them to build an environment for mutual interaction. Around 79 percent of the respondents positively reacted to the question whereas 18 percent of them responded negatively. Most of the respondents confirmed that their association with Kudumbashree is the prime reason behind such a networking. The researcher has included two cases.

Case XXXVIII: The researcher was overwhelmed by the reception obtained from Karuna's group. Karuna was her group's active member and it was she who helped the researcher to uncover some of the basic problems faced by their group. Karuna had more than ten years of experience in this field and was confident enough to explain the paths adopted by them to sustain their group. The researcher also noted that all the members of the group were busy doing data entry and customers were coming to print certain documents as well. Over all, this KITE seemed very active and live when compared to other groups.

"I joined this group in 2000 and since then, I have made all the efforts along with my group to pull ourselves out of all the misery we have undergone. The most problematic period came when KM withdrew its support and asked us to make a consortium. It is true that they intended to strengthen us by making us self-reliant but some of the groups broke down and stopped working. Our group was also on the verge of it as some of the members left us due to their family issues and other job opportunities. Due to our association with the Panchayath president, we were able to get certain data entry works from them and it was during this period when I understood the importance of networking. We have tried our best to create a network of our customers, mainly government officials, local community and political leaders so as to retrieve maximum works. Apart from data entry we also do bill transactions, DTP work, file printing and Photostat."

Case XXXIX: After qualifying her matriculation Susha joined for a computer course. Her family was poor and they could not support her with further studies and asked her enrol herself in a course which can help her attain job easily. After completing her course, through Kudumbashree she started her journey as a KITE member. Initially for her, the whole environment looked supportive but it was difficult after her marriage as her in laws didn't allow her to attend any classes provided by KM.

“My life is my home and I am grateful to them that they have not asked me to stop working here. I do the job asked by the officials and then support my group members in all the ventures they undertake. I have contact with my neighbourhood but I don’t maintain any contacts with my customers to make sure that the works are obtained all the time. It is true that I depend on my group for my survival because my husband is also working in a small firm and getting very less salary.”

These women had to maintain effective contacts and relationships with their fellow members from the 14 districts of Kerala in order to attain maximum benefit out of the joint work. Along with these connections, they also had to tether their enterprises with various government departments, officials and some private agencies so as to sustain all time availability of work. They also had to interact with the neighbourhood, local community, political leaders and social workers in order to propagate the activities undertaken by them. The researcher also noted that those who lacked enough social networks were either dependent on their group members or were the followers of the strongest team member. They were aware of this situation but never liked to work hard in order to create networks because they did not find any adequate reason for the same. Through the discussions, it was observed that the prime reason for such participation in networking was especially due to KITEs. They got involved in ICT and learned to use it for their betterment. As stated in the previous chapter, all the 63 KITEs had their own e-mail address by which they communicated official matters.

Traveling is an unavoidable part of the life of KITE members. They are supposed to travel for attending official meetings, or for informal gatherings in order to propagate their objectives and programme as well as to brain storm ideas to solve their problems. Societal norms and values don’t allow much mobility for women keeping in view their safety and security but these women travel where ever they want in order to fulfil their aims. Through the field work, the researcher found that around 74 percent of the respondents positively reacted to the query whereas 24 percent of them disagreed that they lacked enough mobility to travel for the needs of work. To support the above discussed matter, the researcher has given two case.

Case XXXX: Sindhu was her group leader and an efficient data operator. She worked hard for her group and it was evident through the responses the researcher obtained from the group members. She seemed like the strongest of them all and she had also acquired the position of an executive member in Unnathi Consortium.

“I travel a lot for working in KITE. We need to attend workshops before very project and we also have to attend certain personality classes organized by them. I don’t have any problem at home as my parents look after my children much better than I do. My in-laws are also very supportive and they motivate me to participate in such activities.”

Case XXXXII: Mumtaz was an active group member. She also worked hard for her group and was observed by the researcher through her proficiency in discussing the matters that happen during past 14 years. But she looked distressed while speaking about her mobility and freedom to travel from her hometown to other places.

“I live in a joint family and they don’t allow me to travel far from this hometown. From my group, other members travel to attend the meeting but my mobility is restricted to this hometown only. I have three children at home and they force me to look after the elders and the other children at our home. Even if I want to go, the religious norms that we are supposed to follow don’t permit us.”

They mostly travelled in group and before starting journey they used to communicate with every other KITE in the 14 districts of Kerala. This task of coordinating the visit was done by the executive members of *Unnathi Consortium*. Some of the members could not travel because of the several restrictions they had to face from their family. They were constrained by the responsibilities they had towards them and especially in case of Muslim families, the women were forced to stay back due to the religious norms and values. The key informants stated that spatial mobility was a necessary factor for propagating the ideologies of KM. For this purpose, the women entrepreneurs were asked to travel for meetings and gatherings. After such a long experience, they now knew to arrange travels on their own.

The work obtained by these women are mostly time bound which restricts their freedom and forces them to sit for late night work. It is their duty to complete the task within the time allotted or **finish the task by staying late night**. It is difficult for women to stay away from their home and do the work sitting in their office for all day and night. Societal norms also don't allow women to travel at night away from home and if they do so, it creates a social stigma against them. The researcher explored this factor to understand the freedom of mobility experienced by these women entrepreneurs. 79 percent of the respondents agreed to have gone this extreme to finish an assignment where as 20 percent of them responded negatively. Some of the experiences cited by these women were very astonishing for the researcher as they used to close the door of their office and sat all night to reach the target. Two examples are given in the following sections to illustrate the experiences of these respondents.

Case XXXXIII: Seena was very excited when she discussed this matter of staying late night to finish the task. She showed the researcher some of the utensils they had stored in their office for use them when there is a need. She said that most of the respondents in her group came together at night to finish the work within the time limit. For them it also was a way to share and care for each other like family. It was these experiences as understood by the researcher that bonded them together as a group.

“It is difficult for us to do work at night and initially our families didn't allow it but after they understood the responsibility we have to complete the task, they started supporting us. My husband came to pick me up at night after the work or sometimes we used to close the shutter and sit inside to do our work. When our family members called us to take us home, we would open the door. It is like an adventure because we all enjoy this excitement and fear.”

Case XXXXIV: Suma was in her late 30s and she had a child who was a girl. She had a nuclear family and hence was responsible for her home. She admitted her inability to help her fellow members while they worked at late night. She had to reach home before her child arrived from school. Also, her family restricted the freedom to travel late night with the intention of keeping her safe and secure.

“My husband doesn’t allow me to stay late night because according to him as it is not safe. And he cannot leave our daughter at home alone to pick me up and it is not safe to bring her also at that time. I feel miserable sometimes for not making my full effort in helping my group but I have no other way.”

Some of them even brought their children to the units in order to take care of them. They slept there and made food from the same place. Others who couldn’t do it had family constraints which prevented them from joining their fellow group mates. They did majority of the work during day time and others did it during night. A method of shifting duties were brought by these women during the initial years when they ten members in their group but now as the number has gone down to 5, they struggle more to keep up with the time. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was a necessity for them to sustain their working environment and hence, to earn a living. For this purpose, they transformed their working environment into home where they could gather freely and stay till late night. It demonstrates perseverance and according to these women, it was beneficial for them as they shared their opinions and strengthened their bonds during such tough time.

It is a primary freedom to be enjoyed by any individual to have the **liberty to visit their family and friends**. When it comes to the case of women, it is much required because the feeling of safety and security they receive from their own home can be found very rarely somewhere else. It is a need to experience the warmth from these significant others. The researcher enquired on these matters in order to reflect on the mobility enjoyed by them being working women or entrepreneurs. Through the field work it was found that majority of the i.e. 93 percent had control over their mobility and enjoyed the freedom to visit their friends and relatives. There were less restrictions imposed on these women because they were self – reliant and had built up an image of a powerful individual who could do things by themselves. The researcher has added two cases claimed from the field notes.

Case XXXXV: Manju freely interacted with the researcher which demonstrated her personality which seemed to be very powerful. She was working in her KITE for more than ten years. Her ability to work was first identified by her husband who

motivated her to join. She was given full liberty by him and his family so that she develop herself as a successful entrepreneur.

“I visit my parents and friends whenever I want to. My husband sometimes accompany me when he gets time. But it is not a rule that I should not travel without him.”

Case XXXVI: Nasriya was the wife of the youngest son of her in-laws. They lived with them and it was her responsibility to look after his parents. This restricted her from travelling freely whenever she wanted to.

“I live with my in-laws and as my husband is busy with his work, I am in charge of the home. I can’t travel much by myself because they are very orthodox and are afraid to break the religious norms. I sometimes get time with my husband to travel to my family. ”

They were old enough to make own decisions which again supported them to travel. Around 6 percent of them were restricted from meeting their families and relatives by themselves. These were some rare cases identified by the researcher and they mainly faced some family issues. These people were also reluctant in disclosing their problems. They were too constrained by their family or they were situated very far from the place of their stay. Women who were between the age group of 30 - 35 preferred to travel more to their friends and families because they demanded more support from their families in times of needs. The index value of 54 shows a satisfactory case.

6.3.5. Group Solidarity

Solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) is determined by the social cohesion and understanding that they share by becoming a part of a group. In such social settings, common experiences of work and homogeneity of individuals can lead to group integration. The Table 6.5 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents on group solidarity.

Table 6.5. Frequency distribution on Group Solidarity

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I treat my group as family.	Strongly Agree	160	57.14	74
		Agree	111	39.64	
		No Opinion	02	0.72	

		Disagree	07	2.5	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
2.	My group approves my opinion.	Strongly Agree	98	35	58
		Agree	163	58.21	
		No Opinion	03	1.08	
		Disagree	16	5.71	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	
3.	I am determined to work in KITE.	Strongly Agree	109	38.93	65
		Agree	157	56.07	
		No Opinion	08	2.86	
		Disagree	06	2.14	
		Strongly Disagree	00	00	

Source: Field work

To understand solidarity existing amongst them, it was necessary to unravel whether they considered their **group as family**. In the previous sections the researcher has cited a lot of examples which prove their attachment towards their group. Around 97 percent of the respondents stated positively whereas the rest of them i.e. 3 percent of them did not react much. This shows the significant role played by their respective groups in the lives of these respondents. The researcher has also added a case obtained from the field.

Case XXXVII: Latha was her group's leader and she was very vocal in explaining the various informal discussions they had in their group.

“Our group is like a family where we can sit and talk for long hours. We did our work and along with that, we share our issues. We know each other very well and this is prime reason for our unity. If any issues occur in our group then we all sit together to find a solution for that.”

Almost all of the respondents irrespective of their age stated that they liked to be in their group because of the presence of a homely feeling. It was in their group, that most of them shared their feelings, opinions, problems and issues. These women even had discovered a mechanism to resolve conflicts in order to maintain a congenial environment for everyone. This activity of grievance redressals was mostly done by the group leader who would initiate the process of discussions amongst the group members to speak on the problem. Women who were more than 40 years of age also took a leading role in solving the group's issues. Those women who responded negatively were having some issues with their group members.

They were not revealing the issues but through certain discussions, the researcher found that it was mainly associated with the sharing of the earnings. It is this process which legitimizes actor's continuity over time and is referred to as the actor's sustainability. This study has analysed actor's sustainability in three ways – social, economic and political. The index value of 74 shows a satisfactory case.

The researcher also tried to probe into the factor whether the members get **group approval on opinions raised** by them individually. Most of the respondents i.e. 93 percent of them pointed out the freedom and acceptance they enjoy in these groups. It was also very clear through the group discussions that they mostly preferred to be in their group because they attained huge respect and recognition which was more than what they could receive from their family members. This paved way for them to maintain such informal group which could do formal works. They seemed motivated by this factor and it was very stimulating for the researcher to understand that this particular aspect called acceptance was finding huge significance in the lives of these women entrepreneurs. They wanted to get appreciated and cherished that would enhance their self – esteem. The researcher has also provided a case from the field work.

Case XXXVIII: Sreekala was very happy when the researcher met her. She seemed excited by the research work which was mainly targeted on them. She belonged to a joint family and had two sons to look after. She spoke on her ideas regarding her group.

“My group is like my family. We spend most of our time sitting in this group. Being a part of a joint family, I do find myself lost in the household chores but this is the place where I could gather with my friends and talk as an individual.”

Women especially belonging to joint families stated that they were strongly connected to their group because their opinions were recognized by their fellow group members. They lacked such a freedom in their homes mainly due to the restraints faced as part of societal norms. Around 7 percent of the respondents reacted negatively which was observed as a reaction to some of the internal conflicts

happening in some of the groups. The index value of 58 indicates an adequate environment for these women.

Through this research, their **determination to work in KITEs** was also enquired. It was very interesting to discover that around 95 percent of the respondents wanted to continue their journey in KITEs. As discussed in the previous chapter, these women had faced a lot of hurdles in their path but still they were determined to work in KITEs. Initially, it was difficult for the researcher to identify the reason for such a trend found amongst them but through group discussions, it was found that they enjoyed the appreciations obtained by them from their fellow members. According to them, it was the emotional attachment they had towards their group which motivated them to work in KITEs despite all the hardships. The researcher has cited a case obtained from the field.

Case XXXIX: Suma was an active group member of KITE. She was unmarried and lived with her parents. She was 37 years old and had more than ten years of experience in this field. Even though, she was reluctant in describing her viewpoints but a lot of effort, she spoke her mind.

“I have faced a lot of societal judgements as I am an unmarried woman at this age but the only relief I have is my unit and my group members who are like my family members. They know my issues and we five have worked hard to sustain this group. We hope for a bright future and hence, I will not leave my group for a better job.”

Some other respondents were identified during the field work who liked to work in KITE because they had no other option to look for. Such women were mostly above the age group of 40. For them this group was like a place to rest and share their feelings. The kind of care and security they enjoyed from their groups was missing from their homes. The index value of 65 shows a satisfactory situation for them.

6.4. Economic Empowerment

According to OECD (2012), which is an agency that works to promote policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world

considers economic empowerment of women as a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. It can be the capacity of the women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes that will result in an enhancement of dignity and ability to manifest a fairer distribution of the welfares (Eyben et.al, 2008). It can increase women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. This factor can in turn strengthen women's rights enabling them to have more control over their lives and as a result exert more influence in society. All these reasons make it very necessary to understand the impact of the programmes organized by government for women because it is this economic empowerment that can actually cause a huge change in terms of social and political empowerment through their increased respect, status, and self-confidence. This could also result in increased decision-making power in households, communities and institutions. Many studies have affirmed this link through their findings (Mitter, 2004; Hill, 2011; Kabeer, 2011; Varghese, 2011) and in this work also, the researcher has tried to explore the various dimensions of empowerment in terms of economic factors. Hence, the researcher has operationally defined economic empowerment as the process of accumulating capital through the collective labour performed to exercise greater control over means of production, relations of production and life choices. To collect data, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, conversation analysis, walking analysis and key-informant interviews were the prime methods employed.

In the following section, the researcher has explained the four indicators namely instrumental, human capital, producer and progressive which define the economic aspects of these women entrepreneurs with respect to empowerment. They explicitly delineate economic empowerment and are measured based on the responses obtained on the questions asked to them. There are a set of seven or eight questions under each indicator which are to be answered on the basis of Likert's five point scale. The researcher has also substantiated the observed findings by adding two cases, identified through interviews and these cases represent the disparity found in the responses.

6.4.1. Instrumental

These are the specific methods of behaviour where an individual rationally calculates both goals and means and the most efficient resources are weighed, assessed to obtain the desired end. It is this ability of practical reasoning which helps a person to perform technical tasks, solve problems and hence, accomplish the objective of achieving the end goal. Weber's analysis of the types of social action also speaks of instrumental or purposeful rationality. In this study, the researcher has also explored the means-end rational action associated with this group of women entrepreneurs because such character traits or personal characteristics make up the ability to convert the available means into techniques which in turn produce a socially enduring environment to attain the targets or goals. Such skills can boost these women entrepreneurs to empower themselves by achieving the envisioned aims. The Table 6.6 below, demonstrates certain factors that explains the instrumental traits of these women entrepreneurs belonging to KITEs. The table is followed by a detailed description of the sub-indicators along with cases which illuminates on the differences of the responses observed by the researcher through the field study.

Table 6.6. Frequency distribution on Instrumental

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I was active in attaining the goals of my KITE.	Strongly agree	64	22.86	50
		Agree	167	59.64	
		No opinion	36	12.86	
		Disagree	13	4.64	
		Strongly disagree	00	00	
2.	I was involved in making my group reach financial stability.	Strongly agree	104	37.14	62
		Agree	160	57.14	
		No opinion	00	00	
		Disagree	12	4.29	
		Strongly disagree	04	1.43	
3.	I work only for my needs.	Strongly agree	87	31.07	53
		Agree	161	57.5	

		No opinion	06	2.14	
		Disagree	14	5.00	
		Strongly disagree	12	4.29	
4.	I will leave my group for a better job.	Strongly agree	90	32.14	48
		Agree	141	50.36	
		No opinion	10	3.57	
		Disagree	25	8.93	
		Strongly disagree	14	5.0	

Source: Field work

The prime goals of KITE was to enhance the participation of women through the effective use of ICT and make them capable of doing any type of data processing works in English, Malayalam and Tamil (KM, 2014). Being a part of KITE, these women were supposed to **actively participate in achieving the targets** of their IT unit which included conducting orientation classes for other Kudumbashree members, undertaking bulk orders of data entry and executing the work within the stipulated time limit. Around 83 percent of the members positively reacted to the question which indicates that most of the women entrepreneurs working in the IT units of Kudumbashree have undertaken tremendous effort to make their unit achieve its aim. Through the FGDs, the researcher found that these abilities were accumulated by them through the vigorous training they obtained from KM itself. The key informants also stated that they were involved in making these women capable of rationally handling critical situations where they must act accordingly to reach the end goal. A very few of them, i.e. 5 percent of the respondents negatively responded to this situation and 13 percent amongst these women were silent which show that these women entrepreneurs have not participated actively in supporting their IT unit to reach its target. Through the interviews, the researcher could find that these negatively responded women usually depended on their group leaders or the ‘path makers’ who stood forward in finding ways to make their unit succeed in most of the tasks. It was also observed by the researcher that in most of the groups, only one or two members would authoritatively speak regarding the various means adopted by their respective group to sustain their employment. Through FGDs, it was also discovered that most of the

women could not even think of handling such responsibilities before joining KITE and they were inculcated by the KM, with the skills of managing critical situations through persistent guidance. To illustrate the above discussed factors, the researcher has added two cases below.

Case I: Gita was her group leader and looked enthusiastic in engaging her group members to interact with the researcher. Her coordinating skill was very evident as along with handling the discussions, she was also communicating over the phone with other acquaintances of her. She was the only one who could recall most of the challenges they faced to reach at this stage of their career.

“I made sure of my group to participate in the activities that was supposed to be done by us. We had to complete the data entry within the time limit and we had to coordinate our work so as to finish it on time. Sometimes we get 1 year time and in some other cases we get only 6 months but we are forced to complete the work as we are the only available group who can do the data entry faster than anybody else. The reason behind this ability is our long experience in this field of data entry. We either hired people from outside to complete the task or we worked in shifts. Some of us would work from noon till late night to make sure that the work is finished on time.”

Case II: Maya hesitated while interacting and most of her answers looked ambiguous. They lacked clarity and rather preferred to limit her answers in two or three sentences. It was difficult for the researcher to understand her response as she mainly looked at her group leader while answering the questions.

“I usually try to do work ordered by the group leader. She handles most of her activities and I don’t interfere into that. Our group has certain targets and to achieve these targets, we sit together to discuss and understand the problem that might come in our path. She handles most of the discussions and plans our task systematically. I like to follow her suggestions.”

The above cases are only certain examples identified by the researcher and it becomes obvious that only a particular section of these women entrepreneurs have gathered such capability to rationally consider the means in order to obtain the targeted goal. Through the field work, it was observed that the women entrepreneurs belonging to the districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram were outstandingly forward in terms of such potentials. The

groups of these regions were very vocal in explaining the tangible and intangible resources employed in the process of accomplishing the tasks provided to them. They trained and recruited other people, hired extra rooms and computers as well as worked for long hours to ensure their position amongst other KITEs. These women saw it as their duty to work hard for the sustenance of their group. The index value with respect to this attribute is 50 percent which is indicating a favourable situation for the women entrepreneurs working in KITEs.

Finance embodies uncertainty (Diamond and Dybvig, 1983) and it encompasses different aspects like infrastructure, institutions and markets. These IT units are equipped with their own financial system and its stability needs to be furnished with an efficient allocation of economic resources, the ability to assess, manage financial crisis and even maintain to perform their key functions unaffected by external shocks or imbalances. They were meant to complete their tasks through self-corrective mechanisms. These multidimensional skills were propagated to them through the several sessions organized by the KM. The researcher also understood that, without inheriting such range of stability, it would be difficult of a group to survive. Through the interviews done for the study, it became very clear that financial instability was one of the major hurdles faced by these group members. It was necessary for them to contribute their maximum effort in ensuring the performance of their group by dissipating the economic imbalances. The various workshops of KM were meant for making these women capable enough to **facilitate the financial stability** of their respective IT units. The researcher found that around 94 percent of the respondents ensured their groups consistency to withstand any unanticipated events. This is a huge section of women entrepreneurs which indicates the positive effect of the various trainings and workshops which were meant to make them capable to operate efficiently in a market system. Through the FGDs, it became evident that these fundamental information and required skills were imparted to them by the rigorous effort of the officials of KM. Every year a meeting is held in Thiruvananthapuram to analyse the present status of KITEs and the gaps existing in their system to rectify and confront the different setbacks that can occur in their path. 6 percent of the respondents disagreed with this statement showcasing a very small section of these entrepreneurs who have not

effectively supported their group to reach economic stability. Even though they have contributed a particular amount while joining the KITE but later, they declined in exhibiting the required exertion in sustaining their respective group. It was also noted through the discussions that these were the women who denied from participating in the various workshops, seminars and classes provided by the KM, especially meant for tackling such hurdles. These entrepreneurs were usually reluctant in disclosing their role amongst the group members of their respective IT unit. The researcher has also added two cases to demonstrate the disparity observed in the field.

Case III: Karthika belonged to a financially unstable family as her husband was working in as a sweeper in a private hospital and could earn only ₹ 7000 per month. He very rarely went to work and was usually found in the IT unit. The researcher also met her husband who was looking after their child. But Karthika looked very professional and dedicated towards her work as it was upon her to uplift her family.

“I have to look after my family and for this purpose, I need to make sure of the survival of this group. I was working as a LIC agent and dropped that job to join KITE. I already have these vocal skills and this has helped me to make certain contacts. Financial stability is required for a group to handle any of the unanticipated shocks that would come across us. Currently, we struggling to maintain a safe position by arranging works by ourselves to support our IT unit financially.”

Case IV: Susha was aloof during all the discussions and seemed like lacking any points to describe her position in her group. She discussed on the initial amount that they had to pay before starting the unit but she couldn't explain any further matters to prove her abilities in making her group financially stable.

“I have deposited the required money during the initial stage but later on most of the steps taken to relieve our group from the atrocities were put forward by our group member and we supported her. At a particular stage it was difficult for us to find any jobs and it was during this period when we actually found the major ways like spreading messages to our friends through social networking and by circulating notices and advertisements in various government departments, to enhance the popularity of our IT unit.”

The researcher also understood through the FGDs that the formation of Unnathi consortium had affected some of the IT units leading to its decline because after its formation the KM denied in participating to provide them with the customer base as usually did before. The remaining 63 IT units were the strongest and amongst them the KITEs of Kozhikode, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram remained on the top from each region. Major struggle to retain their financial stability was undertaken by one of the unit in Malappuram, which was geographically in a disadvantageous position. They were located in an old building, at the corner of a floor which was unoccupied by any other shops. It was not even possible to see the unit from outside and this had affected their customer base a lot. They were retaining this office because of the low amount of rent they were supposed to pay. After, they understood that their customer base was getting low, they planned under the guidance of their leader to print and circulate the pamphlets, notices and advertisements on their group explaining the major activities handled by them. This in turn helped them a bit because they could get the sufficient capital to ensure the survival of their group. They didn't had much surplus capital left with them as most of the income obtained was spent on the logistics and room rent. All the 63 KITEs had repaid their subsidized loans taken for initiating the IT enterprise. This is again an indicative of the fact that these KITEs during the beginning were succoured by the government of Kerala and hence, secured maximum works leading to high capital accumulation.

People are bombarded with information everywhere through the television, radio, mobile phones, the internet and many more. But if people are to be engaged, the best way is to advertise through radio and television. If such a provision is not available, the best method is to communicate through the various social networks available like mobile phones, Facebook and Whatsapp. The other way is to spread the message as a face to face conversation and it was this method adopted by the women entrepreneurs of KITE to create an awareness on the major activities done by them. Through key informant interviewing, the researcher found that the KM officials initially assured them of jobs required for the working of their survival. The prime canvassing was done by these officials through the inter-departmental networking, which helped these women entrepreneurs the acquiring

contacts from several local government institutions. The work was made easy for them as they had to do only the data entry of the hard copies of government files. But later on when the KM withdrew from supporting them, with the intention of making them self-reliant became the reason for the downfall of most of the KITEs. Hence, now it was their task to ensure the sustainability of their group for which they had to **canvass works**. 56 percent of the respondents agreed to have worked for canvassing some assignments for their groups whereas around 40 percent of them disagreed from the fact of providing any help to their group in the form of canvassing work. Through the FGDs, it became very clear that these canvassing were limited mostly to the local self - government departments of the respective districts. Some of the groups continuously were supplied with works because of the strong social networking they had with the officials of the government institutions. Some of the groups applied for obtaining the provisions of *Akshaya* services so that they could enhance their sustainability by avoiding any chances of disruption in their activities. Those who couldn't do the canvassing work were basically subsided in their group. These members followed their group leaders who would work hard to obtain the tenders from their networks. The researcher has added two cases observed during the field visit.

Case V: Navya was amongst the top working members of her group who would do all the required activities to sustain their position in the data entry market. She looked focussed and determined from the rest of her group members. She was mid aged woman having two children and living in a nuclear family.

“Our enterprise is at one of the busiest places in this city. This location which is near to the bus stand has also helped us to gather some work for members. When its continuity cannot be assured because we don't get full time support in terms of work from the KM. To make sure of getting the proposals of work, we visited certain hospitals, Panchayath offices, RTO offices and Corporation offices to obtain any immediate data entry works available with them. This visit has also helped us to create contacts with the officials, which again has served the purpose.”

Case VI: It was very difficult for the researcher to identify the office of Rama. She was sitting in the IT unit alone without any other group members. Upon enquiring the researcher came to know that the other members were busy working somewhere

else. She was reluctant in interacting with the researcher as she thought that it was some kind of an inquiry arranged by the Kudumbashree itself. Her unit seemed vacant and empty as there were only 3 computers where as in other units, the researcher could find 6 to 7 computers.

“Our group leader was determined in sustaining our group and hence asked us to move out of our unit to visit other institutions and organizations for the purpose of data entry. I was appointed here by the leader as she wanted me to look after the customers coming to the unit especially for bill transactions. I have not canvassed any work for my group because I never had to get tensed about the availability of works as these were the department of those who mostly interacted with the officials.”

The researcher could evidently observe that the communication and interaction of the officials were restricted to a particular section of this women community. In Malappuram, which is a Muslim concentrated region, the researcher found that mostly Muslim women performed the role of negotiating with the government officials to ensure the availability of data entry assignments. Another reason for this favourable situation for Muslim women was that the local political leaders and community welfare officers were basically Muslim which supplemented them with extra advantage over other sections of women in their group. One of the group in this district had acquired the status of *Akshaya* centre which was an added convenience for them because it could help them sustain effectively as these *Akshaya* service centres are now the prime ICT project of Kerala by the KSITM which handle almost all the e-services of the government departments. They could acquire these services because one of the member in their group was the relative of the Council Chairperson of Valanchery Municipality situated in the Malappuram district of Kerala. Their unit was initially the Vidyashree IT unit of that region, who handled the computer training of school children but with the emergence of IT@school, another project by the GOK to introduce IT training in schools led to the decline of these enterprises. As these Vidyashree IT units are the sub sections of KITE, their decline meant a great loss to these enterprises. But some of them survived like the one discussed above. This was the same situation observed in Kottayam district as well where the conditions were favourable for Christian community although they formed the minority in this

IT programme. Whereas in all over Kerala, the researcher was getting certain feedback from these women entrepreneurs which indicated a political influence in determining the fondness from some of the government institutions where the political affiliation of the group was considered before the allotment of works. The members were very reluctant in answering such questions but the key informants corroborated the observation of the researcher by stating that such disassociation and segregation from the part of certain government officials were noticed by them as well. Canvassing was not a much issue for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kozhikode and Kannur districts of Kerala because they were corporation and hence, were entitled with the benefits of availing customer base from the variety of public and private sector institutions, organizations and associations which provided them the benefit of protecting their survival. Through the discussions, the researcher could understand that these provisions were lacking for the groups who were not under a corporation. Consequently, the index value is very low i.e. 18 percent which doesn't show a supportive environment for these women entrepreneurs.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the process of empowerment begins with the realization of any of the five fundamental needs and it is followed by the action taken to fulfil these needs. In this study also, the researcher has tried to uncover whether these women joined KITE to claim a suitable action to **fulfil their needs**. There is an exchange of rewards where the women are rewarded in the form of financial capital and the authorities obtain information in a simplified manner. This act of exchange motivated these women entrepreneurs to get involved in the process of undertaking the same action again. But the researcher probed to know that whether the motivation to fulfil the needs were the stimulus behind their formation and sustenance as a group. 89 percent of the respondents positively reacted to the statement which indicates that majority of them are inclined towards achieving their needs whereas a very few amongst them i.e. around 9 percent, negatively agreed to the statement and they assertively reacted to this question stating that they placed more importance to their group than the needs. The women who belonged to this category were highly bonded to their group. Most of them in this group of women were leaders who were responsible for establishing their

group. But through the FGDs, the researcher observed that these women respondents were motivated to enter into this government programme by invoking their need to gain financial capital as a reward and it was this expectation which acted as a stimuli to enhance the number of participants from all over Kerala. There are two cases provided below which explain the disparity observed in the field.

Case VII: Anu was a spontaneous member of her group and she soon became friends with the researcher. She was easily explaining all the problems faced by the enterprise with an intention to spread the word with the help of the researcher. She was hopeful that the researcher would help them to enhance their working environment. When the researcher asked her motivation behind joining such enterprise, the first reaction was like this.

“I hail from a poor background and I am focussed to take care of my family which is possible only by getting money. KITE is the best place where I can work because of the security and safety in the working environment. We used to get huge income before but now the condition is not the same but we hope that someday it will change.”

Case VIII: Lekha was her group leader. She looked like a mid - aged woman with a lot of experience in this field. She was very friendly to the researcher and showed all the characteristics of a good leader. She was the one who motivated her group members to interact freely with the researcher. Her presence helped the researcher to understand that she was highly bonded to her group and it was more like her family than a workplace.

“I joined KITE to get money but now it is like my home. We all sit and discuss our issues with each other in this unit. We all are connected to this unit a lot and the cohesiveness will always persist. I will not leave this unit even if I don’t get any reward. I am sure someday we will prosper.”

Before becoming employed as in KITE, these women were in need of money and as ICT was a growing and promising field, this venture of GOK seemed to have a lot of scope for huge development in case of women from BPL background. The officials were also keen in employing women from poor background with sufficient educational qualification. To push this programme deep into the mass, they focussed on monetary benefits while proposing the programme

and propagating the prime objectives. They aimed at functional simplification of government departments by employing women and training them to digitize government files. These women from beginning itself were focussed on acquiring especially monetary benefits through their participation and hence, they worked hard to propagate this programme. They were regular in their work which was again an aftermath of the agenda followed by the officials. Through key informant interviewing, the researcher found that during the initial years, huge accumulation of financial capital was observed amongst these women and they it was made possible by the KM. Most of the women got married due to the income saved by them from their work and they were also allowed by their families to continue their employment in KITE. These women through the FGDs clearly stated that their decision to get employed in KITE was a rational choice taken by them to achieve the goal of becoming financially stable. The researcher also noted that these women had a lot of internal conflicts based on the difference of opinion and remuneration which were usually solved by the group leaders. These groups seemed like a closed entity where they couldn't tolerate the participation of any new members because they believed that the smaller the group, the more the benefit as the profit will be distributed only between these members. One of the key informant specified that this attraction to their material needs was the prime reason for the rational decision taken for limiting the group membership to 5 members per group. The index score of 53 shows a favourable position for this statement.

After knowing the motivating reason behind their decision to get employed into KITE, the researcher was keen to explore whether they would **refuse to participate in a better job than KITE**. This query paved a way to understand the solidarity between these members and the high degree of collective consciousness they demand to exist within their group. Though most of the respondents hesitated from answering this question but the FGDs could reveal the reality easily. Only 46 percent of the respondents stated that they won't leave their group for a better job and 50 percent of these women disclosed their wish to opt for other better jobs if provided. This finding unveiled the fact that the basis for the cohesiveness was grounded in their resemblance and likeness to one important factor which is to satisfy needs and amongst these needs, the most prominent one was associated with

material needs. Even the key informants expressed their concern over this issue and stated that amongst these women only a very few of them were bonded to their groups apart from their needs with the intention of working for the benefit of all group members. Such members assured that the works were getting diffused to all members of their group and the wealth was not getting concentrated into the hands of a few. Amongst the 46 percent of women, there were certain respondents who without getting enough financial capital liked to continue their job in KITE and it was in such cases where the researcher found the emergence of another need which gratified the purpose of obtaining symbolic capital which refers to the resources available to an individual based on their prestige or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). These were some of the superordinate members of the group who were established as dominant leaders and this power legitimized over the group members served their physiological need. The researcher has added two cases which demonstrates the difference observed in the field.

Case IX: Vanaja was a hard worker as explained by the DMC of their district. She was focussed on her work and helped other members to complete the work on time. She was the one in her group who would meet the officials for the purpose of all the groups coming under their district. She happily welcomed the researcher as the study itself was focussed on them. She demanded that she would never leave the unit because she expected that there is prosperity in future.

“I can’t leave this unit because it is at this place where I understood my capabilities. This enterprise has provided me the opportunity to fulfil my basic needs like food, shelter and cloths. And I have worked day-night to ensure that we obtain work without any delay.”

Case X: Shaila was working in a small office room when the researcher met her. She seemed very coy but after a long explanation on the work, she admitted the researcher to ask questions. But it was evident that she was not interested to answer questions. She was the only person sitting in that office and when enquired about other members, the researcher came to know that some were busy with certain personal matters whereas others had not arrived.

“I would certainly leave this job because staying here is not providing me with any profit. There was a time when we used to

get good income for the works done but I don't think those time will come back. I have crossed the age limit for employment but still I am trying to get into some other profitable business.”

Through the FGDs, it was identified that some of the respondents were continuing their employment in KITE because they had crossed the age limit for attaining a job whereas others who belonged to the age group of 20-31 and early 30s were still in search of an apt job. Though the respondents were reluctant in revealing in working status but through certain interactions, it became clear that a very few of these members were working and obtaining income through other means. It seemed that some of them were part of other *Kudumbashree* ventures as well. Hence, the collective entity of women entrepreneurs which reflected social bonding, integration and social cohesion was actually a manifestation of the need to achieve capital and it was a rational choice made by these women to form, work and sustain a group. Hence, the researcher would like to name this phenomenon as instrumental solidarity. It is the collective identity guided by reason and calculation to rationally achieve the determined end. But on the contrary, those KITEs which were situated in the six corporations of Kerala which are: Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kozhikode and Kannur mostly denied from leaving the employment for other jobs whereas IT units of other districts especially Wayanad, Idukki, some units of Malappuram and Pathanamthitta highly responded indicating the search for other jobs. In the above case. The prime reason for the disparity is the lack of enough data entry works for the KITEs which are not situated under the administration of a corporation. The index score of 4 also specifies the unfavourable condition for women in KITEs.

6.4.2. Human capital

This concept is strictly an economic term (Sawyer, 1978) and it pertains to particular attributes of man (Schultz, 1961). It arises out of any activity which is able to enhance the productivity of that individual worker. The decision of investing in one's human capital is dependent on the attractiveness of higher future income in exchange of higher training and deferred consumption. In this study, it refers to the collective skills, abilities, knowledge or the related imperceptible assets or capital which upgrades the economic value of an individual or their community.

The accumulation of human capital can reinforce their chances of empowerment making wide arena of opportunities available to them. Table 6.7 discusses the ground realities on the accumulation of human capital by the women entrepreneurs of KITEs.

Table 6.7. Frequency distribution on Human Capital

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I have tried to enhance my educational qualification.	Strongly agree	00	00	- 38
		Agree	48	17.14	
		No opinion	04	1.43	
		Disagree	195	69.64	
		Strongly disagree	33	11.79	
2.	I have attended all the trainings provided by the KM.	Strongly agree	95	33.93	48
		Agree	132	47.14	
		No opinion	11	3.93	
		Disagree	32	11.43	
		Strongly disagree	10	3.57	
3.	I can work independently without any help from my group members.	Strongly agree	47	16.79	4
		Agree	83	29.64	
		No opinion	33	11.79	
		Disagree	78	27.86	
		Strongly disagree	39	13.93	
4.	My group looks for me in times of trouble.	Strongly agree	75	26.79	3
		Agree	46	16.43	
		No opinion	14	5.00	
		Disagree	111	39.64	
		Strongly disagree	34	12.14	
5.	I have canvassed works for my group.	Strongly agree	57	20.36	18
		Agree	101	36.07	
		No opinion	09	3.21	
		Disagree	110	39.29	
		Strongly disagree	03	1.07	

Source: Field work

There is a causal linkage between amount of schooling and the economic advancement of both individuals and societies (Scott and Marshall, 2009). It depicts that social mobility is associated with the educational credentials of the labourer. In this study, the researcher is trying to understand whether these women entrepreneurs have **tried to enhance their educational qualification** after joining KITE. Because through key informant interviewing, the researcher found that these women became a part of Kudumbashree at a very young age of 20 to 23 years. Most of them were unmarried and were either studying or in search of a job. The KM officials preferred technologically educated labours to handle the upcoming technology of computers in those days. Hence, all the women entrepreneurs were given sufficient IT training and workshops to prepare them for the required assignments. But even in the presence of such a progressive environment, only 17 percent of the respondents have at least tried to expand their educational sphere whereas a huge number of them, i.e. 81 percent, have not even tried to increase their educational credentials. Through the FGDs, the researcher could also find that most of the IT unit members who successfully gained higher educational levels had left the programme opting for advanced employment. The researcher through key informant interviewing found that during the initial periods there were more than 1500 women entrepreneurs who participated in this government programme but several of them either got married and the left the job and others secured higher employment in terms of its permanency. From the above retrieved data, the researcher observed that most of the women didn't opt for other employment because of the freedom and safety enjoyed by working in this government programme. They also got busy with their family matters and some of them even got married which increased their responsibilities and duties, reducing time to at least think about one's qualifications. In case of some of the women entrepreneurs, the researcher could understand that by the time they had noticed a lag in their education, it was too late because they had become aged and hence, pre-occupied with several other liabilities restricting their social mobility. The researcher has included two cases observed during the field visit.

Case VII: Sakhi was her group leader and a very friendly person. She seemed vocal in describing her experiences after coming to KITE. Her group members also

listened to her patiently, depicting her role in the group she belonged to. She was a graduate in economics and had several certificates on computer training programmes. The researcher was curious to know her reason for not leaving KITE.

“I joined this group while I was doing my graduation. I made sure that it gets completed properly. Along with graduation, I had also attended some computer training programme organized by our Panchayath and it helped me a lot in understanding the basics of ICT. The trainings and workshops provided by KM has also promoted me to move forward with accepting the various tasks and works given to us by the KM. Soon after graduation, I got married which restricted my mobility in terms of education and it is the prime reason that I did not opt for joining other higher level courses. Mine is a nuclear family which again adds up my responsibility towards my family.”

Case VIII: Suhana lived in a joint family and was a PDC or + 2 qualified KITE member. Initially, she was reluctant in expressing her viewpoints to the researcher but after a long process of probing into her answers, the discussion became very active. She got married while doing her graduation which was stopped thereafter. She specified that she had to move to her in-laws house which was very far from her college. With their permission she joined for an IT training programme held under the Municipality, and it was through this programme that she got absorbed into KITE.

“It was difficult for me to leave my college but it is our responsibility to listen to our family and I did that. The only option I had was to join for an upcoming IT training provided by the Municipality and soon through this training, I got selected into KITE. After coming to KITE, I have never tried to enhance my educational qualification because I didn’t get enough time. I was busy with the work and with family matters. Also, our religion doesn’t support higher education for women.”

If we look at the educational qualification of the respondents, it was observed through the field study that Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram stood forward in terms of respondents with credentials more than matric or 10th and the list was followed by Thrissur, Kottayam, Palakkad and Kannur. Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kottayam, Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram had more number of graduates and postgraduates. But the number of post graduate degree holders were very less when compared to graduates or PDC holders. All these women were

certificate holders of various IT training programmes organized by government or other private agencies. Amongst these women, most of them who had enhanced their educational credentials after joining KITE belonged mainly to the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Kottayam and Kannur. Thiruvananthapuram was the first district to start KITE and as a result they had enough opportunities when compared to others. This district is the capital of Kerala State which adds up to the benefits these members can have. Most of them completed their graduation after joining KITE because they gained maximum profit due to the maximum presence of government head offices and state departments which provided them huge works. The head office of KM is also situated here, which increases their possibility to obtain works without much delays. There are many educational institutions near the premises of KITE which is in an urban area enabling them to enrol into a number of classes which suits them. Through FGDs, the researcher found that most of the women had attended PSC coaching classes while working at KITE and those who qualified the examination have entered into government jobs. Ernakulam is a cosmopolitan city and the trade capital of Kerala which promotes huge number of educational developments. As it is a corporation, the women situated in Ernakulam had the opportunity to attend several classes. Most of the respondents completed their graduation and post-graduation only after joining KITE. Kottayam is home to several literary institutions like schools and colleges. Here also, the researcher observed that women had tried to have upward mobility in terms of their educational attainment after becoming a part of KITE and some of the women who managed to gain permanent employment left the IT unit. Similar trend was seen in the district of Kannur also. Most of the negative responses were obtained from the districts of Wayanad, Kasargode and Malappuram. The reasons obtained through the field study show that the lack of development, infrastructure and educational institutions along with the cultural barriers set for women in these regions restricted them. The researcher could notice through the interviews that even if these women were encouraged to pursue higher studies, they were expected to be primary caretakers of their home rather than pursuing a challenging career. Even the index -38 is depicting an unsupportive state of women entrepreneurs in KITE when it comes to attaining high educational credentials.

As stated in the previous chapters, these women entrepreneurs became a member of this novel programme organized by the government of Kerala only after attending the basic IT training held at the office of KM. The officials already preferred women with prior IT training but they were compulsorily made to **attend the IT workshops and sessions arranged by the KM**. It was an essential factor in case of KITE because only after undertaking such sessions, they could understand the basics of data entry. The researcher through the key informant interview found that these women were given numerous number of self-learning classes, sessions, training, seminars and workshops to socialize them into the Kudumbashree environment. Essentials of business administration, marketing and advertising were taught to them through these classes. 81 percent of the respondents positively responded to this question which indicates that most of them have qualified the basic trainings provided by the KM and they were keen in learning and becoming entrepreneurs. Around 15 percent of the respondents could not attend all the trainings provided at the KM head office because of either household restrictions or some personal issues like health problems, lack of finance or lack of interest etc. These people learned the required matters from their co-members which helped them to work unaffected by the failure to attend the classes. Through the FGDs, the researcher observed that more than learning such common meetings and gathering acted as a mechanism to solve conflicts which existed between groups. They also used this platform to share mutual ideas, opinions and plans to develop their KITEs. It was these necessary classes which made them to move out of their comfort and in turn enhanced their spatial mobility. They saw it as a leisure activity because during their stay in Thiruvananthapuram, they were not bound to any household chores. The researcher has provided two cases retrieved from the field work done for the study.

Case IX: Mallika was an active member of her group and she displayed all the characteristics of an experienced KITE worker. She was vocal and specific when questions were asked about her. She was working on her computer when the researcher arrived. She immediately stopped her work and eagerly asked about the objectives of the study.

“With regard to training, I have attended all the workshops and classes provided by the KM. They were keen in making us self-reliant when it came to entrepreneurship. I have attended software coaching, hardware workshops and personality development classes provided at the head office. It is also interesting to travel such a long distance because we won’t be alone. I coordinate all the members of my district and make sure that we reach on time. It is probably like a tour. We also try to visit certain tourist attractions while visiting Thiruvananthapuram.”

Case X: Geetha was reluctant while explaining herself to the researcher. She always looked at her watch and other group members which symbolized her disinterest or inhibition towards the questions asked by the researcher. She was living in a nuclear family and had two children to look after. She was married while she joined KITE. Her husband supported her works but her parents did not allow her to travel far.

“I learned the required skills from other members. It is not always possible by a married woman to travel on her wish because she has look after certain customs. The societal norms and values don’t allow women to move freely. Also, after two years I was having a child which further restricted my mobility. But I made sure that I learn all the essential knowledge taught during the workshops from my fellow members. We help each other in such situations because a huge data entry work can only be completed by a rigorous and trained group activity.”

Even though the members were reluctant in disclosing their participation because some of them thought the study done by the researcher was to supply information to the KM, which is the highest authority in their case. They were afraid whether these information would affect their membership in KITE. Most of the respondents managed to attend during the initial stages because most of them were unmarried and were undoubtedly supported by their parents. But later on, the participation started to reduce mainly due to household issues and restrictions after marriage. This factor did not affect much the women population of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Ernakulam, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Alappuzha and Kottayam because they need not travel more because of their nearness to Thiruvananthapuram where most of the workshops were held. The women of north Kerala suffered the most as they took around ten hours to travel from their district to Thiruvananthapuram. In case of high altitude regions like Idukki and Wayanad, the mobility of the women entrepreneurs was challenging. Amongst these districts,

the women of Wayanad region suffered the most because they lacked proper transportation facilities. They don't even have a railway station for themselves and hence, they travel to Kozhikode in order to get a train. Idukki is in the central region and they can easily find a local transportation facilities like bus or jeep that would drop them. While analysing participation in terms of present age, the researcher found that most women from the age group of 41-50 attended the workshops when compared to the other age groups. These women mostly were experienced and had adult children who could look after themselves. This was not the case for other women who were in the age group of 20-30 or 31-40. Except for some of the women who had health issues, all other women belonging to the age group of 41-50 preferred to travel along with their co-members. Those who belonged to joint and extended family were free to travel when compared to those in nuclear family because they were less bound to responsibilities and their duties were shared by other family members while they were absent from home. In case of Muslim women, they could rarely travel even if they were from joint or nuclear family. Through the interviews the researcher found that they restricted by the religious norms and values. Women from Christian and Hindu families were more mobile when compared to Muslim women. The index value is 48 which shows an encouraging environment for women of KITE.

The researcher has also tried to know whether these women were already **employed before joining KITE**. It was mainly enquired with an intention of understanding the link between their conduct as an entrepreneur with their already established human capital. Having a degree or a certificate course in IT can be considered as a tremendous qualification when it comes to making one employable but the only way to stand out as a potential worker requires work experience. The key informants also stated that they preferred already trained and experienced women in order to easily push data entry works to them as these women would have the essential skills, contacts, expertise and competence which cannot be taught in a classroom. These qualities can only be learned through experience which were very much valued by the KM officials. Through the field data obtained, it was found that only around 31 percent of the respondents were already employed in a temporary job before coming to KITE and the rest of them, i.e. 65 percent of them were

unemployed before merging into KITE. Those who already had working experience, were employed in a temporary job which lacked any job security or safety like tuition teacher, sales girl in a shop and as LIC agent. Their prime motive to join in such government initiated programme was to ensure their freedom and security. These IT units were not a controlled environment where they had to work for the specific time period but in these IT units, they could work based on their comfort. As they had women, it also attracted many families to employ their female children into these enterprises. Most of the women who were unemployed were studying in colleges or in computer courses. To illustrate the above discussed facts, the researcher has added two cases.

Case XI: Sunitha was her group leader and an efficient KITE worker. She was describing about the condition of KITE in Malappuram. She also helped the researcher to initiate a discussion with her group mates. She was holding her 6 year old child with her while discussing the matters on KITE. She seemed very friendly to interact with and she helped the researcher in finding other KITEs as well.

“Before I joined KITE, I was working as LIC agent. The job was good but required a lot of travelling. It was at this time when I heard about KITE through the Neighbourhood group. As it was government’s initiative, I thought of enrolling myself into it. My previous work experience has helped a lot in connecting with people because as LIC agents we have to interact with people a lot.”

Case XII: Malathi was shy when she saw the researcher. She kept on working on her computer until the researcher reached to her. She was friendly but seemed very reluctant in answering some questions. Through interviewing, the researcher came to know that she was unemployed before joining KITE. She was living in a joint family and was married soon after completing her graduation. She did enrol herself in a computer coaching centre but soon got employed in KITE.

“Soon after my graduation I was married to a shopkeeper. My family was very poor and they were keen on getting me married as I have a younger sister. My in-laws asked me to join for a computer training so as to get any job but it was at this time that I heard about KITE and I joined here. I did find some difficulty in adjusting during the initial stage but with the help of my group members, I learned the required skills.”

Through key informant interviewing, the researcher found that most of the outstanding women entrepreneurs from KITE were already employed before they joined IT unit. The researcher through field study could understand that all the units had some exceptional women representatives and most of these women already had some working experience. They usually belonged to Ernakulam and Kottayam district because of the wide range of possibilities available for them. Ernakulam is the trade capital of Kerala where the government is initiating a lot of development activities and this place is filled with various private institutions itself. But all of them had undergone computer training either from other agencies or from KM. All the Muslim women were unemployed which indicated the various cultural barriers experienced by them. But all the women were members of various NHGs which had already provided them the experience of group activities. Through FGDs, the researcher observed that those women who had more educational qualification were employed in some way though in a temporary manner. The researcher also observed that women who had more education and a previous working experience were vocal and pragmatic which indicates the rational thinking developed through all these factors. These women stated that they could easily adjust into this environment because of their previous experience with work and also the skills, knowledge and the reasoning ability formed out of the education they have undergone. They also appreciated the officials of KM who were keen in the evolution of an entrepreneur out of them. An index value of -18 depicts a low population of women who were employed before joining KITE.

Effective leaders possess exceptional organizational skills and it is the presence of these abilities which makes them the prime facilitator of their group. The researcher has also tried to understand whether the group members **are aware of their own importance in the group** they belong. It was identified by enquiring on the factor that demonstrates the presence of a leader in a group. A leader is always sought after during the time of troubles and the researcher has asked the same question to the respondents in order to recognize the self-awareness of these group members. The data collected revealed that 43 percent of the respondents have positively reacted to the question where as 52 percent of the respondents have negatively answered which indicates that not all members are considered significant

in their respective groups. As stated in the previous chapter, the researcher observed through the field study that a particular section amongst these women were 'natural leaders' who got a chance to polish their abilities through the several trainings provided by the KM. The FGDs could come out with some findings by which the researcher could understand that these leaders were not the same before they joined KITE. Some of them were employed whereas the rest were working for the first time. These women systematically developed their human capital by imbibing the skills, values and knowledge provided through the KM officials. Their participation in the group activities and the chance to lead a group was the actual reason which provoked the inherent abilities of leadership within them. The key informants also stated that they had the intention to develop the capabilities of these household women because without such enlightenment it would be difficult for them to survive in the market as entrepreneurs. Women who have responded negatively were those group of entrepreneurs who depended on these leaders and sought their suggestions before taking any decisions for the purpose of the group. Such women usually were found to be reluctant in answering questions asked to them by the researcher and before answering any of them, these women looked for any insinuating gestures from their respective group leaders. The researcher has also added two cases which demonstrate the disparity.

Case XIII: Dhanya was an active member of her group and it was understood by the researcher through the various gestures which implied her dominant role in the group. She was specific when it came to give answers and the researcher could find that most of the queries regarding her group members were answered by her.

“I was not like this before I joined the group but I had to become the way I am now. And I am proud of the various activities we have done in our group. We have provided orientation classes for other women in our neighbourhood to propagate the idea of Kudumbashree. My group depends on me the most and it is the reason which restricts me from moving away. We solve the conflicts together under my guidance and they look for me when it comes to suggest any solutions even to their family problems.”

Case XIV: Najma was very silent from the moment researcher had entered their office. Her group leader said that she is usually not the same as she was not that day. Her gestures revealed her inhibitions and when it was her turn to answer, the

researcher found her very coy. Most of the time she was looking at other group members especially her group leader before answering certain questions.

“I like working because everybody here is like my family now. They have helped me in learning the skills which quite difficult for me to understand. I depend on our group leader because she handles most of the transactions with the officials and she is also good at it. I basically do the mechanical work and most of the mental work is done by our leaders.”

It must also be noted that these women who acquired the abilities were not the same before joining KITE. They were socialized to be the way they are now by the Kudumbashree officials. The organization skills were imparted to them for the purpose of maintaining KITEs. The researcher through the various FGDs conducted amongst these women could find that those who were supported by their family usually learned these skills much faster than others. Some others had such abilities inherent in them which got nurtured by their active participation in the several programmes organized by the KM. One of the key informant stated during his interview that those women entrepreneurs who took the workshops and classes arranged by the KM seriously became more developed than others. He also said that the women who remained shy even after long hours of attending personality classes remained unaffected by such ventures of KM. Such women followed their leaders and lacked an effective ability to make own decisions in time of need. While visiting the groups and during FGDs, the researcher has tried to probe into the methodology used by these women in transmitted information. The researcher observed the ethnomethodology used by these group of women which includes the explicit and implicit methods which create a social order amongst them. The researcher employed conversation analysis and walking analysis amongst a group of women entrepreneurs in the district of Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kollam. Conversation analysis can describe and explicate the various conversations that an ordinary speaker use while participating in a socially organized interaction whereas walking analysis was used to understand the different walking strategies if any used by the women of a particular group. These two methods helped the researcher to understand the presence of a covert strata existing between them. The researcher observed that the powerful dominant members usually facilitated the

group to engage in a discussion and emphasised the solidarity and group consciousness existing between them. They were the ones who provided most of the introductory or the elemental factors associated with the group. And their behaviour was reinforced by the behaviour of others who seemed to be supporting the existing undiscovered status of these women. Even the walking analysis which was done without their knowledge, revealed the above finding as the researcher observed that the subordinate members were following their superordinate members and no one was trying to overtake them reassuring the presence of an unknown strata existing amongst them. This gesture was not required as everyone was aware of the place going to be visited but they were all adhering to the one woman who was accepted as their leader. These particular analysis was conducted without their awareness as some of the group members accompanied the researcher to meet their fellow entrepreneurs and it was this occasion which helped the researcher to move forward with this analysis. The index value which is 3 also illustrates the presence of less amount of dependable women entrepreneurs in KITE.

6.4.3. Producer

The concept of producer refers to those individuals who do the labour in order to produce the capital, goods, productive assets and property required for securing the necessities of life. The producer by generating these materialistic possessions can reaffirm their probability of controlling the means of production. This can in turn augment their status amongst their group and family. The Table 6.8 below illustrates the characteristics of producer acquired by the women entrepreneurs of KITEs.

Table 6.8. Frequency distribution on Producer

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I own productive assets.	Strongly agree	106	37.86	44
		Agree	95	33.93	
		No opinion	31	11.07	
		Disagree	38	13.57	
		Strongly disagree	10	3.57	

2.	Decisions on household minor purchase are discussed with me.	Strongly agree	79	28.21	28
		Agree	106	37.86	
		No opinion	09	3.21	
		Disagree	67	23.93	
		Strongly disagree	19	6.79	
3.	Decisions on household major purchase are discussed with me.	Strongly agree	68	24.29	21
		Agree	102	36.42	
		No opinion	06	2.14	
		Disagree	85	30.36	
		Strongly disagree	19	6.79	
4.	I have the liberty to decide the use of my income.	Strongly agree	175	62.5	59
		Agree	48	17.14	
		No opinion	06	2.14	
		Disagree	34	12.14	
		Strongly disagree	17	6.07	
5.	A certain portion of my income is contributed towards family regularly.	Strongly agree	20	7.14	-16
		Agree	98	35	
		No opinion	02	0.72	
		Disagree	90	32.14	
		Strongly disagree	70	25	

Source: Field work

Economic empowerment is also concerned with the **accumulation of productive assets** like real estate rentals, land, machinery, house, jewels and animals which are beneficial for the owner and produce profit. Even though most of the respondents were initially reluctant in answering these questions but after prolonged discussion with them, the researcher came to know the details. Through the interviews and FGDs, it was understood that these units received maximum profit during the initial 5 to 7 years which helped them to support their family and collect assets as part of personal property. It was also found that some of the units got ₹ 50,000 per head while completing a huge data entry project. It was during these years when they saved money for their personal expenses and family needs. From the data collected, it was realized that around 72 percent of these women entrepreneurs have successfully gained assets like land, house and jewels. 17

percent of them couldn't gain and save enough income because they lacked work efficiency, work capital and they were mostly from extreme poor background which forced them to use the obtained money for covering up their family needs, some of them even repaid their family loans after joining KITE. During FGDs, these women cherished to recall the past as they wanted to relive it and seemed like they are still awaiting for the same in future. Their material need were taken care by the KM officials because they could understand the thrust provided by financial capital. They were sanctioned by providing rewards in the form of income and these payments were made regularly without any delay. There are two cases discussed below collected from the field.

Case XV: Leena was a group member of a very active group which was known for its efficiency and working skill. She was very articulated while explaining the major benefits they had received financially after becoming a part of KITE. All her group members supported her and they too went very nostalgic while speaking on their past experience.

“My marriage happened due to the income obtained as part of the work done for Kudumbashree. It helped and supported my family as well because most of the burden was eased due to the huge amount paid to us after the completion of work. The Kudumbashree officials were very particular in ensuring regular payment for the women entrepreneurs of KITE. I bought some land and jewels from the money saved.”

Case XVI: Sreejamol belonged to a poor family and she was unmarried. She was very reluctant in discussing her personal matters to the researcher but it took some time for her open herself and reveal the problems which led them to exist in poverty.

“The office room rent was too high and we also had to repay the loan of ₹ 2, 90,000 within the specified time. I couldn't save much because I too had to repay the loan of ₹ 3, 00,000 taken as home loan. Whatever income I received from this unit was spent in my home and our unit also had some internal issues amongst the members which disintegrated the unity of our IT enterprise. Some of the members stopped coming and hence, the works got affected. Due to these issues we had to transfer our data entry works to other units in the same district.”

Thiruvananthapuram was leading in terms of the collection of productive assets because it was in this district where the first KITEs were established by the GOK. They had works in abundance and it promoted them to produce maximum profit. Also, in those years no other unit was engaged in data entry. The KM officials also supported them and made sure that the payments are made regularly after every work. But it was observed by the researcher that the officials who came later to this programme were not keen in making sure of the availability of financial capital for these enterprises. All these units had to repay the loan which was around ₹ 2, 90, 000 obtained from the local banks from each district. In case of Thiruvananthapuram, the loans were taken from Syndicate bank and the project cost was ₹ 2, 90, 000. Through the FGDs, the researcher identified that these women respondents were not realizing the various empowering factors they had gain through their participation in KITE but they were only concerned about their material needs. The index score of 44 shows that these women have gathered assets collected through their participation in KITEs.

It is known worldwide that for many centuries women were treated equally as men in many ways, though in different context (Smith and Byron, 2005; Sokhi-Bulley, 2006). Power on decision making is also an important determinant of empowerment and several authors have defined decision making as a process that results in the selection of one or more option(s) out of several alternatives and it can considered synonymous with making choices or stand (Karl, 1995; Kabeer, 1999; Rowland, 1997, Neema, 2015). Here, in this study, the researcher has tried to identify whether these women **control the decisions on the household minor purchase** and the data showed that around 66 percent of the respondents participate in household decision making on the purchase of minor items whereas 31 percent are deprived of this power. Through the FGDs, it was discovered that this power to make decisions in their household matters was obtained by them due to their employment. A lot of women stated that this shift in power was the result of their association with the numerous activities performed as part of KITE. Their families became aware of their skills and capabilities only after these women started to accomplish the material needs of the family members. This raised their status amongst their family members and community and as a result they were

participated in most of the decision making process of the household. The women who could not achieve this power were basically from very poor background and lived in a joint family. The education status of these family members and especially of spouse was found to be very low. Such educationally backward families followed patriarchy and still couldn't accept gender equality. According to Steil (1997), marriage is a relationship characterized by a power struggle, however muted or disguised it may be in any particular case.

The researcher has also probed into the decision making power of these respondents with regard to the **major purchases** made at their home. It was necessary to explore whether the decision making power of these respondents was limited to minor purchase. Through the field study, it was found that 61 percent of them actively participated in such discussions whereas 37 percent were in a subjugated position. But the researcher also observed that those who had freedom to participate in the decision making process of minor purchasing lacked power in case of major purchasing. It indicates that still patriarchy is followed in many households of Kerala and women, even after achieving employment are dominated by the male members of their family. Through the FGDs, the researcher found that some of the established entrepreneurs of KITE were also controlled by the male heads of their family. Such women viewed their participation in KITE as the only way to obtain their physiological needs. Here also, the researcher observed that women belonging to educated families were not suppressed by the male heads of their family. Most of the women from Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Thrissur and Kozhikode were not in a subjugated state because these units were not much affected by the lack of work as the strong leadership of their DMCs and KITEs always pro-actively supported the members with enough work to sustain themselves. The researcher has also given two cases which demonstrate the disparity observed in the field.

Case XVII: Sini belonged to a joint family and was one of the active members of her district. She showed a new mobile bought with her income obtained through her work in KITE. She was very happy when she spoke about her family. Her husband was working as electrician and was a well-read man. He always stood forward in her family to support her with the work she was doing.

“I am always supported by my husband and he makes sure that my decisions are also included while purchasing anything, let it be minor or major. While getting huge profit out of KITE, I always made an effort to save some money for my family. He appreciated that gesture of mine and after that, he has always represented my decisions in household discussions.”

Case XVIII: Shahina was reluctant to interact with the researcher from the moment she saw her. She belonged to a joint family and an orthodox Muslim family. She explained that it was difficult for her to get permission from her family to join in KITE and she was allowed to come as the unit was near to her home.

“In my home decisions are taken by my husband and his elder brother. My husband has low educational qualification than mine and he works in a private firm where he gets very low income. But our family has good property and it was this reason that restricted me to become employed. I was determined to get a job because I didn't wanted to waste my education.”

In case of Muslim women, the condition of respondents from Malappuram was found to be more subjugated than their fellow Muslim members from other districts. It is basically because this district is mostly populated with Muslims and they intend to follow the cultural and religious traits unaltered till this date. Such an adherence to cultural norms, customs and values have affected the active participation of women in such government initiated ventures. Those women who headed certain IT units were either relatives of local political leaders or they were acting as mere tools for implementing the decisions of other dominating people. The index score for the decision making power of women for minor and major is 28 and 21 respectively which indicates that both are favourable for them and their power in making decisions for major purchase is unsatisfactory.

The **liberty to decide the use of income** is another factor which was explored in this study by the researcher. Along with possessing the power to decide the major and minor purchases undertaken in a household, it is also essential to have the 'power over' one's income. Through key informant interviewing, the researcher understood that most of the women had full liberty in deciding the use of their income because during the initials years working in an IT firm implied a high status job and this outlook of the community led women to have power over their

environment. Though they couldn't receive income during the end of every month as the tasks were contractual in nature. All the lump sum was paid after completing the whole project. This huge gathering of amount helped them to repay their loans fast and the rest of the amount was used for family purposes. The researcher identified that around 80 percent of the respondents had the privilege to decide the use of their income on their own and around 18 percent of them were not allowed to use their income freely. Some of the respondents who positively agreed to the statement also said that this condition was changing as at the present situation they were deprived of income which made them dependent on their family and hence increasing their liabilities to use the money properly with the concern of their family members, especially, male heads. Through FGDs, it was identified that most of them liked to support their families with the income they obtained out of KITE. Most of them were concerned about their children's future and reserved most of the portion from the income for the education and needs of them. This trend was basically found in case of women who had girl child and they seemed very tensed about the lack of payment which was the major problem faced by them. They liked helping their family and saw it as their responsibility to safeguard the needs of the family members. Those who lacked liberty to make effective use of their income were bound up with huge responsibility from their family. They were also financially backward and needed the income they gained from this enterprise to form the foundation of their household activities. All of them preferred supporting their family and it was valued more than their own needs.

The researcher also tried to understand whether these women **regularly supported their family with the income** they obtained through KITEs. As discussed above, most of them had the liberty to decide the use of their income which was used by them for the benefit of their family. In this case, the researcher was keen in knowing the meticulous effort made by these women in supporting their family. Through the data collected, it was observed that 42 percent of the respondents supported their family regularly using their income while the rest of them i.e. 57 percent couldn't make sure the regular support which they intended to do. As the researcher could not understand such disparity because they had the liberty to decide the use of their income and they also participated in the decision

making process of their family but it was necessary to explore the reason that caused this irregularity from their side. Through key informant interviewing and FGDs, it was identified that most the prime cause was the irregular payment of income after the completion of their work. Whatever minimum income was procured by them was used for maintaining and repairing the logistics of their IT unit. All of them stated that initially they had obtained huge income from their work and this was the prime reason which sustained their participation KITE. The researcher has also added two cases which show the disparity.

Case XIX: Lekshmi was an experienced entrepreneur and spoke high about her family. She was also interested to speak about her husband who had supported all through the beginning. She belonged to one of the best KITEs in the whole Kerala. They were known for their efficiency and speed.

“I was always given freedom by my family to decide the use of my income and I have always supported them with whatever income I obtained through my work. Before getting married, the only condition I had was to allow me to continue my employment in KITE and my husband readily accepted it. Since, then he has supported me and I do save a lot of money for my children. There was a stage when we could not get enough work and at that time we were supported by our DMC who found work for us.”

Case XX: Archana was a strong member of her group which was situated near the Municipality office. They did sustain their group after facing a lot of hardships and this skill had made them experienced enough to maintain a status amongst other groups. She also married after joining KITE and demanded that she should be allowed to work.

“Initially I didn’t face much impediments from my family but all the problems started after our programme began disappointing us. We were not getting enough income and still we are unable to make sure whether we will have permanent income by sustaining this unit. And it has forced me to stop supporting my family by regularly providing them financial aid. My husband is working in a shop and the job is not permanent. I have a daughter and I am really concerned about her family. ”

The researcher could understand through the interviews and discussions that before joining in such a venture, they had not imagined a life that they are

having now. During those years, IT was an upcoming field which assured great job openings as part of the development programmes. It was only after joining KITEs that they could actually fulfil their needs and even understand the relevant skills required to sustain in life. They learned the essential business skills and the researcher realized that it was the impact of such knowledge gathering which developed the process of rational thinking amongst them. The index score of 59 for the liberty of using their income shows a favourable environment for these women whereas a score of -16 is depicting an unsatisfactory state for them regularly support their family in monetary terms.

6.4.4. Progressive

An individual, in economic terms can be considered progressive if they have conceived new knowledge and improved quality of life. They should have developed gradually and reached at a better position than their initial condition. A progressive person also contributes to their family and group by performing certain essential functions. The Table 6.9 below demonstrates the necessary factors that represent a progressive women entrepreneurs of KITEs.

Table 6.9. Frequency distribution on Progressive

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I can undertake and manage the economic affairs of my family.	Strongly agree	73	26.07	32
		Agree	127	45.36	
		No opinion	08	2.86	
		Disagree	49	17.5	
		Strongly disagree	23	8.21	
2.	I can undertake and manage the economic transactions of my group.	Strongly agree	75	26.79	36
		Agree	130	46.43	
		No opinion	10	3.57	
		Disagree	50	17.86	
		Strongly disagree	15	5.36	
3.	I know how to open a bank count.	Strongly agree	218	77.86	84
		Agree	49	17.5	
		No opinion	00	00	
		Disagree	10	3.57	

		Strongly disagree	03	1.07	
4.	I spend on my child's education.	Strongly agree	112	40	57
		Agree	130	46.43	
		No opinion	08	2.86	
		Disagree	25	8.93	
		Strongly disagree	05	1.79	

Source: Field work

Economic empowerment depicts an improved quality of life which requires sufficient participation from these women. The researcher through this study has tried to understand whether these women had become **capable of handling the economic affairs of their family**. It was intended to probe into the prime reasons behind such a progress in their attitude and activity which they demand they have achieve. The key informants also stated that these women had undergone tremendous change which has positively encouraged them to handle the responsibilities of their family as well. The researcher also realized that all the workshops, classes and seminars were not only focussed on making these entrepreneurs ready to enter and sustain in the market but these officials also tried to make these women self-sufficient in managing household affairs. 71 percent of the respondents positively responded to the question which indicates that majority of them have achieved the capability to manage the economic affairs of their family. 26 percent of these women negatively responded showing that they were unable to organize and administer the financial matters of their family. Through the FGDs, it was identified that such a huge progress was the after effect of the various experience they had undergone as part of their journey in KITE. These women also stated that the officials had prompted them to survive and assure their visibility in household matters. Hence, all the sessions arranged by the KM also proposed them to enhance their capacity to save, manage and expend income for the proper purpose. The researcher has also stated two cases which demonstrate the difference observed in the field.

Along with the above characteristic, the study has also focussed on the **capability to handle official economic transactions** which are directly related to

their employment. The data showed that around 73 percent of the respondents were confident to carry out such responsibilities whereas 23 percent of them were unsure of their own capabilities to manage such economic transactions. This information represents the fact that more number of women are aware of their ability to handle economic transactions of their group when compared to women who could handle economic affairs of their family. This also illustrates that still some of the households are dominated by the male heads and those women who belong to such families are subjugated by the norms existing to maintain the social order. Most of the respondents who could handle such responsibilities stated that such a state was achieved by them only after their admission to Kudumbashree. Their status raised after becoming KITE entrepreneurs and this boosted them to enhance their interest in learning the basic skills to reinforce their status in the community they survived. The researcher has also added two cases demonstrating the disparity observed.

Case XXI: Sumitha was unmarried while getting enrolled into KITE and she has always looked to participate in all the sessions organized by the KM. She looked forward to interact with the researcher as she was interested in propagating the works done by the programme.

“The several efforts put forward by the KM officials is the prime reason behind our confidence. All the confidence and skill to manage the economic transactions of the family was systematically developed by utilizing the knowledge imparted by them. I can handle both the economic affairs of my family and group because if one can learn the method of transaction followed in a group can also understand the system to be followed in one’s home.”

Case XXII: Sangeetha was an active member of her group who intended to work for the betterment of her group. She was attached to the group which was visible through her gestures towards her group members. Some of the members were not present when the researcher met her but she was very vocal in describing their works as well. With regard to her ability to manage the economic transactions of her family and group, the researcher understood that she could handle the later but the former was done only with the support of her husband.

“I live in a nuclear family and I have the freedom to effectively use my income but when it comes to enter into the economic

affairs of my family, it is always my husband who supersedes me. Major economic transactions can be done only with his consent because he is doubtful about my skills.”

As was obtained, the index score for the former rationale of transaction is 32 which is lower than the later which is 36. Through FGDs, the researcher could also identify that this lower percentage is due to the system of patriarchy still existing in many families of our country. It was difficult for women entrepreneurs to stand out and represent themselves in the economic affairs of their family. Usually, such situations were found in joint families whereas in nuclear families, these women secured more liberty. But they do admit that the constraining effect of such social facts on these women were reduced after they began to deliver the means to achieve the various needs of the family they belonged.

Another elemental factor which depicts the awareness of women with respect to economic affairs is the ability and knowledge to be confident enough to **open a bank account** on their own. All these women were expected to have gathered this information on opening a bank account but the researcher found that a very few of them were still unaware of such activities. Around 5 percent of the respondents were unskilled in terms of having the basic comprehension on initiating the process of banking. But on the contrary around 95 percent of the entrepreneurs were confident in dealing with banking transactions. This huge number of women entrepreneurs represent the positive changes that happened as part of their participation and also due to the various efforts of KM officials. The researcher has added two cases which represent the difference.

Case XXIII: Maya was very confident as she was also active in the political affairs of her region. It was visible in her verbal as well as non-verbal communications. She worked in a hospital kiosk arranged by the KITE of their region. She travelled on her own and did all the work by herself.

“By becoming the part of Kudumbashree, we have raise our abilities as without these skills we would not achieve success. During the beginning itself, they motivated us to open bank accounts and all the members were supposed to have their own bank accounts. We had our group accounts which was dealt by the leader and the secretary of the group. As this is obtained by

everyone in the group, all were made to visit banks for the transactions of their group.”

Case XXIV: Tara was initially very reluctant in interacting with the researcher. It was very clear that she was not so active in her group and preferred to listen to her group leaders who were outstanding when compared to the whole groups in their region. It also seemed that she was the same in her family as well because such reactions were not expected by the researcher.

“We have a joint account and my husband handles most of the transactions. In the group also, we have our leaders who have more abilities than me and they help me when it is my turn to visit the bank. I have not attended much of the sessions organized by the KM because I am mostly busy with my household matters.”

Most of the respondents affirmed that the prime reason for the development of such characteristics was related to their association with the *Kudumbashree*. During the initial stages, they found it difficult to understand the basics of banking but after prolonged sessions and training, such skills were imbibed to them by the resource persons of KM. In this case also, the researcher could identify that some women were still unaware of this basic knowledge because their family members didn't recognize it as a problem and also their group members were not much interested in uplifting their group mates. But in case of some KITEs like Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram, Kozhikode and Pathanamthitta, such examples were seen by the researcher.

The researcher was also curious to explore that whether these women **spent their income for their children's education**. Because educating their children was the most beneficial activity they could do to enhance the future prospects of the country and the family. Around 86 percent of the respondents states positively and 11 percent of them responded negatively. Those who agreed to the statement were very confident and enthusiastic in developing a prosperous future for the children because they wanted them to achieve what they lacked. Through the FGDs, the researcher could identify that these women spent most of their income on the matters relevant to their children and some of them even saved their income for the future educational needs. Whereas in case of those women who responded negatively, the researcher found that they mostly depended on their

husband or family and they let the male heads of the family to decide the use of their income which was saved by them. The researcher has identified two cases which depict the disparity observed in the field.

Case XXV: Rumina was a happy member of her family as she alone was the group in her region which attained the Akshaya services. She joined Vidyashree IT units which were meant to train school students on the basics of computer education. After it was closed, she joined with her group mates to the data entry units of Kudumbashree. Through the present unit, she feels secured and safe as it had helped her to save income for her female child. She spoke high of her children and it was observed that he wanted them to join professional courses.

“I save a lot of money for my children and especially for my daughter because she is our responsibility. But I don’t want them to get married soon as it is their future which will be decided by them and as parents it is our duty to help them in securing a higher position in their life. If they like to join in a professional course, we should be ready with the required amount.”

Case XXVI: Seena was her group’s most shy member still she made up her mind to assist the researcher and introduce the various matters handled by them. Their group was small and untidy but it seemed that they were always in rush. The researcher could see the customers coming to the unit every five minutes. This unit was close to the civil station which is the District collector’s office.

“I am living in a joint family and our home is usually dominated by male heads. I do have the liberty to do minor purchases but when it comes to use money in bulk, then I should get the permission from my husband and father-in-law. I do want them to go for higher education but the money will be used by my husband.”

The researcher could also observe that such developments were the result of their active participation in Kudumbashree and through the FGDs, it was found that before joining such programmes, they were unable to gather monetary benefits. These privileges were obtained only due to their involvement in these activities. At present, they were not satisfied with the KM because of the huge lag in the payment and also due to the huge gap experienced by them in procuring new assignments. Those who were above 40 years of age were more concerned about their children

and wanted to obtain a good future for them. The key informants also stated that there was huge change observed amongst these women after their involvement with the activities of Kudumbashree because the several meetings, workshops and seminars were intended for the prosperity of these entrepreneurs as elevating and inspiring them would cause a lot of transformation in their household. The knowledge gathered by these women were in turn used by them to instigate and motivate their children. The index score of 57 also depicts a favourable condition for these women.

6.5. Political Empowerment

Empowerment in the political sphere is concerned with equitable representation of women in political institutions and enhanced ability for women to engage in making decisions that can affect their lives and lives of others like them (Petit, 2012). According to the Human Development Report (2011), India ranks 129 out of 146 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), and even after four years the Human Development Report (2015) shows that India ranks 130 which illustrates the gender disparity which has got submerged into the social system of our Indian society. Much of the country's governance was left in the hands of the elected representatives and officials but this structured mechanism could not produce the desired results especially in including the marginalized sections into the governing process. Hence, the Government of India demonstrated its commitment towards increasing participation of marginalized group, especially poor women by initiating several constitutional, legislative and policy reforms like the 73rd and 74th amendment (GOI, 2006). For the effective constitution of political participation, women should be given equal treatment, training and practice in the process of decision making and the local democratic institutions are the ideal structures for this purpose (Varghese and Mavoothu, 2014). According to the authors Verba et.al. (1995) political participation can be defined as any activity that has the intent or effect of influencing governmental action which can be done either by directly affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who form such policies. By referring to this definition, political participation can be considered as a collection of the variety of activities like voting, attending demonstrations, signing petition, competing in elections,

discussing and representing a political ideology etc. *Kudumbashree* which is a women oriented anti-poverty programme integrated women into small and large groups broadening their views on mobility, voice, participation and network development. The key informants of this study argued that the system SHGs developed as part of *Kudumbashree* has improved the decision making skills of the women, increased the awareness and knowledge of women and it has also improved the position or influence of women in the household. But many research works suggests that women on some points participate less in politics than men do (Varghese and Mavoothu, 2014). It was a study by Miller, Wilford and Donoghue (1999) which discussed the issue on women who are less politically involved and more passive in terms of political dimension when compared to men. Though women face handicaps in politics, their inclusion and participation in group activities has altered their outlook which can empower them as prospective leaders in local political arena. In this work also, the researcher has tried to explore the various dimensions of empowerment in terms of political factors. Hence, the researcher has operationally defined political empowerment in this study as the process of transformation from a passive to an active state reinforcing the ability to determine the direction of change in case of circumstances and events. To collect data, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, conversation analysis, walking analysis and key-informant interviews were used as prime methods.

In the following section, the researcher has explained the three indicators namely administrative, accountable and opinionist which define the political aspects of these women entrepreneurs with respect to empowerment. They explicitly delineate political empowerment and are measured based on the responses obtained on the questions asked to them. There are a set of five or six questions under each indicator which are to be answered on the basis of Likert's five point scale. The researcher has also substantiated the observed findings by adding two cases, identified through interviews and these cases represent the disparity found in the responses.

6.5.1. Administrative

An administrator is an individual who is capable of directing the actions of other persons, can undertake the responsibilities for attaining certain defined goals with suitable activities. According to Katz (1974), there are three basic skills which define an administrator namely, technical, human and conceptual. Technical skills implies an understanding and proficiency of a variety of processes and procedures which are to be performed by the actor. Human skills represents the ability to work in a group and to build organized cooperative effort within the team. Conceptual skill involves the ability to understand the symbiotic relationship existing between the different functions of the organizations and this aids the administrator to visualize the actions that would lead to the overall welfare of the structure. The Table 6.10 below demarks the frequency distribution of respondents on administrative skills.

Table 6.10 Frequency distribution on Administrative

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I have the liberty to decide the use of my husband's income.	Strongly agree	67	23.93	30
		Agree	134	47.86	
		No opinion	05	1.79	
		Disagree	48	17.14	
		Strongly disagree	26	9.29	
2.	I question if any discrimination is happening against women.	Strongly agree	50	17.86	30
		Agree	159	56.79	
		No opinion	02	0.71	
		Disagree	49	17.5	
		Strongly disagree	20	7.14	
3.	I have the ability to form a group of women for a purpose.	Strongly agree	53	18.92	19
		Agree	133	47.5	
		No opinion	05	1.79	
		Disagree	47	16.79	
		Strongly disagree	42	15	
4.	My decisions are represented in my family.	Strongly agree	57	20.36	37
		Agree	162	57.86	

		No opinion	03	1.07	
		Disagree	45	16.07	
		Strongly disagree	13	4.64	
5.	My decisions are represented in community.	Strongly agree	42	15	-4
		Agree	75	26.79	
		No opinion	10	3.57	
		Disagree	123	43.93	
		Strongly disagree	30	10.71	

Source: Field work

Along with the liberty to decide the use of one's own income, the researcher through this attribute has tried to understand the freedom experienced by these women in **deciding the use of husband's income**. The data shows that around 72 percent of the respondents have obtained this power and 26 percent of them still lag behind in making decisions relative to their husband's pay. Through this factor the researcher wanted to probe into the household status of these women in controlling the financial matters of their spouse. A relatively higher number of positive response shows that these women have acquired the ability to handle the monetary aspects of their home. Amongst them, most of the women stated that they had already attained such a right without the interference of any programme. Though most of the members got married after joining KITE, some of the members obtained higher status because of their participation in Kudumbashree as an IT entrepreneur. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that, instead of taking such decisions on the use of their husband's income, they preferred mutual consensus as a process to avoid any conflicts. Some other cases were identified by the researcher where women lost such a privilege after the financial decline of their KITE. When they couldn't fulfil the monetary requirements of their household needs, they gradually lost power over the decision making liberty. The researcher identified two cases to demonstrate the disparity.

Case I: Latha was all on smiles when she heard this question. She belonged to a perfectly working KITE and the IT unit seemed clean and tidy for the researcher. She had to travel more than 10 km to reach this unit and it was her husband who

dropped her off. She got married before joining KITE and she finds no difference in the attitude of her husband towards her before and after joining KITE.

“I can’t find any changes that has happened to him till tis date. We both discuss the use of the money and take actions accordingly. He has never controlled my income and I too have never tried to control his. We decide the use of our income together and we also share a mutual account. Mostly, discussions happen during the case of children’s education, housing etc.”

Case II: Suma was a shy member of her group but she managed to respond to most of the questions. She was married into a joint family after joining KITE. She saved her income through KITE for her child’s education and future. She also stated that it was this income supported her during the initial years of marriage but after they started to experience decline in the availability of assignments, there was gradual drop in her status at home.

“There are certain adjustments which are to be made in order to survive happily. Such actions are mostly taken by women. As I live in a joint family, it is not possible for my husband to take care of our family alone but he has to look after others as well because they help us also. My husband is working on a daily wage which is very difficult to survive on. Initially I got enough income for our sustenance but now the condition is different.”

The researcher also observed that those women who had higher educational qualification did not experience any difficulties in attaining such privileges because there was a trust built upon them by the family members due to their cognitive skills and educational background. Another case identified by the researcher could explain the effect of the KITE’s sustainability on their power and status at respective households. If the IT units were running in a profitable state, its members would get more freedom and power at home, otherwise, the condition was different. Some of the Muslim women from Malappuram cited such examples but in case of Christian women such a lack of power in deciding the use of husband’s income was not found may be because their religious norms are much inspired from Western society where there is comparatively less subordination of women. Mixed reactions were obtained from Hindu women but most of them responded positively. Even the family structure controlled their privileges as they enjoyed less freedom when it came to

joint family system because in such cases, it is difficult to take care of one's own family alone. Also, they had to listen to the elder's opinion and obey the decisions from their spouse. The index value of 30 supports the above discussed findings.

It is the persistent inequality between men and women which leads to gender discrimination in all spheres of life. The dimension and degree of discrimination against women manifests itself in different culture, politics, race, region, countries, and economies differently. However, gender discrimination is considered as a tremendous constraint towards the development process and it is found as a causal factor of violence against women. (Ferdaush, Rahman, 2011). Gender equality is essential for the achievement of human rights for all. Yet there exist certain discriminatory laws against women in every corner of the globe and new discriminatory laws are enacted. In all legal traditions many laws continue to institutionalize second class status for women and girls with regard to nationality and citizenship, health, education, marital rights, employment rights, parental rights, inheritance and property rights. These forms of discrimination against women are incompatible with women's empowerment. Hence, it is essential for women themselves to collectively respond against such atrocities experienced by them. As this study happened to obtain Kudumbashree members, the researcher has tried to understand whether they **question any discriminations happening against women**. The data obtained from the field work stated that 75 percent of the respondents positively responded whereas 25 percent of them responded negatively to the situation. It shows that more than half of the respondents do make certain efforts to react against the hardships faced by women. *Kudumbashree* in its effort to award new life to women prepares the ground for identifying and questioning the atrocities committed against them. Through key informants, the researcher discovered that the intensive training and sessions provided for them are intended to bring a change in their inhibitions by raising their voice against discrimination. This statement was supported by the women respondents as they also admitted that the ability to defend themselves and their fellow women folk was possessed through the efforts of KM officials. The sessions on rights and responsibilities and legal provisions for women have enlightened them on availing the liberty they demand from society. Those women who negatively responded to the statement were

passively involved in the activities of *Kudumbashree* as observed by the researcher. It could also be explained that the recognition one attains in the ability to voice against discrimination draws heavily upon his/her mental state. Even after undergoing such inspiring classes from KM, some of the women felt safe to keep silence while observing any such incidents. They either fortified themselves or depended on their friends or family to act in such situations. The researcher has cited two cases obtained from the field to explain the disparity.

Case III: Saritha was an elder member of her group and seemed dominating when compared to other members in the same group. She had a son who was studying a nearby college and she was a widow which made her to live with her parents. She was confident and self-possessed which made her responses look assertive.

“I am living my parents now and after the passing of my husband it was a difficult situation for me to survive. But with the support of family and friends, I picked up and gathered myself for my son. Being alone, I have trained myself to face any atrocities that would come my way. Sometimes after work, I had to travel alone at night to my home but during all those moments I walk erectly without showing any signs of inhibition or fear. This was the case when my husband left us but now I have learned to live alone by working hard for 10 years.”

Case IV: Sushma was in her late 30s and was pre-occupied with her data entry work. She seemed friendly and talkative while the researcher was interacting with the members present at the IT unit. While asking on the factor of questioning women discrimination, the researcher observed that she suddenly became quiet. The reason remains unknown but her reactions are given below.

“I can’t take decisions in such matters and usually I get help from my friends and family. Also, my husband doesn’t allow me to travel alone, maybe because they are from a conservative family.”

The researcher identified that the factor of age also influenced their answers. Mostly women above the 40 years of age seemed more confident in undertaking such actions whereas most of the women who belonged to the age group of 25 – 35 years showed gestures of inhibition and fear. This can be due to the higher security imposed on young women by their own family members because of the several incidents of atrocities mainly faced by young women and reported by

the media. Those women who were elders had more experience and strong mental state to defend themselves and they were less restricted by their family. Another factor identified by the researcher was based on the regions as women respondents from southern part of Kerala especially Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Ernakulam seemed more aggressive and determined in voicing against such brutal incidents on women discrimination. It may be because of the higher rate of political and social movements occurring in these districts. Women from some of the units of Malappuram were ashamed of participating in such activities and preferred a peaceful life mainly because of the lack of an active socio-political environment and structures that would provoke women to enter into such movements. The index value of 30 also shows a moderate value for this attribute.

The most important aspect of administrative skills is determined by an individual's **ability to form a group for a definite purpose**. Through this study the researcher has tried to discover whether these women entrepreneurs possessed such an ability or were still dependent on the officials to manage any group activities. Through the data obtained, the researcher found that around 66 percent of the respondents positively reacted to the question whereas 32 percent declined of having acquired any such skills. Those women who seemed to be affirmative in having gained such capability were having a history of encounters with such needs. Most of them were NHG or SHG leaders which assured them of having acquired such qualities. They had worked with the officials to gather groups of women for official meetings, trainings, workshops and informal gatherings. Through NHGs they would get together to share their feelings, problems, ideas and needs which helped these women to form an informal network that enables them to construct a social collective dominated by an ideology. But the researcher also observed that most of these women would seek help from their leaders or super-ordinates who guide them to communicate through proper networking. Hence, here in this case also, the role of the super-ordinates was manifested in the form of decision-makers and mentors. The presence of such dominating section of women though seem liberating but it also limits the boundaries of other women who take up the role of followers. The researcher has also added two cases to represent the disparity observed in the field.

Case V: Karthika was very fond of the topic on which the researcher was doing study on. She stated that such a study is required to support them and to present their cases to the public. She was also her group's leader and an active, experienced women entrepreneur of KITE.

“Due to our long term association with Kudumbashree, we have gathered all the abilities required to mentor women folk of our community and to form a collectivity in order to attain certain needs. The rigorous trainings and workshops inspired us to work hard on polishing our skills which according to us played a prime role in developing our capabilities.”

Case VI: Anita was quite from the beginning of the discussion and seemed shy in sharing her experiences with the researcher. She was answering the questions asked by the researcher when they were again repeated by her group leader. This gesture of her was very evidently explaining that she was dependent on her group leader than self-dependent.

“I take support and guidance of my group leader and those I know to arrange such a meeting. Without them it will be difficult for me to gather women.”

The FGDs could come up with the findings that such an upheaval in the abilities of these women was the impact of their association with *Kudumbashree*. The activities that they were meant to perform were basically dependent on collective efforts which enhance their networking because of the requirement of communications. The key informant interviews also supported these findings as the various initiatives headed by the KM was intended to enhance such abilities of women. The index value of 19 also shows lower inheritance of the above stated skills.

This study has also probed into the **acceptance of the decisions made by women in their family and in community**. Family is the fundamental social group consisting of parents and their children. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Welfare (2015), even though family laws govern family relations and seek to protect the vulnerable family members, including women, children and older persons. Fair family law frameworks are especially vital to ensure

gender equality and tackle various forms of violence in families. But social customs, often reflected in the form of laws in society condone practices reinforcing gender inequality within families which are mainly perpetuated for economic reasons and social norms. Such norms and values also restrict women from engaging in communal activities. Therefore, through this study, the researcher has tried to discover whether these women entrepreneurs who demand of having acquired valuable skills from their participation in the ventures of KM. 78 percent of the women respondents positively reacted to the statement whereas 21 percent of them negatively responded in terms of representing their decisions on family matters. More than half of the women do have the ability to communicate assertively amongst family members which is a huge credit acquired by them. Through FGDs, most of these women stated that such a progress was achieved due to the immense support of the KM officials and the huge networks created out of such group participations. In case of their capacity to represent decisions in communities, it was observed that only 42 percent of them stood confident whereas more than half of them i.e. 55 percent responded negatively. It was understood through key informant interviews that the skill to make decisions and to reinforce it in a community requires exceptional leadership qualities, power and status which can be attained by gathering essential credentials valued by society especially political and economic back-up. KM have tried to impart such skills to the entrepreneurs through the various workshops, sessions and contacts provided to them as part of the empowering process. Those who realized the importance of such abilities and understood the basics of resource mobilization experimented their talents in society. The researcher has added two cases which represent the difference observed in the field.

Case VII: Geetha seemed confident and self-reliant. She looked after her family which comprised of only her parents. She was single at the age of 35. She did not discuss more on the reason on this marital status and the researcher also didn't probe much into it because her uneasiness was becoming evident when more questions were asked on this matter.

“I look after my family and I am proud of that. I joined KITE during the age of 22 and after that I learned all the required skills taught by the officials to survive in this society. They give us the theories but we have to make it practical. I have a strong control over my income and my decisions are accepted by my family members. My active participation in Kudumbashree helped me to free myself from all the inhibitions and fear. I am an active social activist which make me a well-known person in my region.”

Case VIII: Salma was married to a joint family during the age of 20. Now, she helps her fellow group mates in running a successful enterprise which in midst of a city. She was reluctant in interacting with the researcher but managed to answer some of the questions in a few words.

“Mine is a joint family and decisions are taken by the male heads of the family. In our customs, women are not encouraged to interfere into decision making process of men. I managed to get a job here because of my parents as they were prompting me to attain an employment. I am in a NHG as well which helps to gather some women but on a mass scale it can be done with the help of leaders. Community wise participation is limited to women folk near my neighbourhood.”

It should also be noted that, women who had freedom to make decisions in their home should be the same in community level. Only a few number of women could confidently speak in front of the public and reinforce their decisions. For such activities to happen, their political association was also considered as a major factor. The index factor for the former attribute is 37 whereas for the later one is -4 which demonstrates an unsatisfactory situation in case of decision making capacity in community level. All over Kerala, women who formed the class of super-ordinates had both the capacities but it was not the same for sub-ordinates. Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Thrissur seemed to have dominating in both the attributes whereas in all other districts, the researcher got mixed responses.

6.5.2. Accountability

It is the ability of individuals to hold themselves as responsible for the actions undertaken by them like the participation and contribution in any events. It also explains the liability of an individual to be accountable for their activities,

behaviour and decisions. Table 6.11 represents the frequency distribution of respondents on accountability.

Table 6.11. Frequency distribution on Accountability

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I am liable for my actions.	Strongly agree	95	33.93	42
		Agree	114	40.71	
		No opinion	04	1.43	
		Disagree	67	23.93	
		Strongly disagree	00	00	
2.	I can confront the authorities for my mistakes.	Strongly agree	72	25.71	29
		Agree	112	40	
		No opinion	30	10.71	
		Disagree	40	14.29	
		Strongly disagree	26	9.29	
3.	I confront my group mates for my mistakes.	Strongly agree	147	52.5	46
		Agree	111	39.64	
		No opinion	22	7.86	
		Disagree	00	00	
		Strongly disagree	00	00	

Source: Field work

As accountability represents an individual's ability to hold themselves **responsible for their actions**, hence the first attribute that comes under this section also tries to unfold this particular quality of women entrepreneurs. Most of the respondents i.e. nearly 75 percent of the total, positively reacted to the statement whereas 24 percent of them responded negatively. This shows that their participation in *Kudumbashree* activities had enhanced their ability of self-assessment. Those who stated that they undertake the responsibilities of own actions were confident enough to take the roles of leadership. As explained in the previous chapters, the researcher could understand that the "superordinates" were more able in taking decisions and correcting errors if any occurred. In case of those women who negatively responded, the researcher could observe that they usually looked at the leaders and other members of their groups before affixing their responses. The researcher also prompted them to respond on whether it was their

decision to join KITE or was it due to certain other factors. Most of them stated that they took it as an opportunity to participate in Kudumbashree as it was backed up by the security offered by the Government when compared to any other private employment. Some of them were dragged into KITE because of their family's economic situation. Some of them had to quit education and opt for such employment whereas some other women got enough support from their family, which prompted them to quit another job to enrol in KITEs. Through the FGDs, it was found that some of them had acquired this employment not due to their family situations but it was the inspiration gathered from the experiences of other women entrepreneurs which motivated them to join KITE. The researcher has included two cases which represent the disparity observed in the field.

Case IX: Vijaya was an active member of her group which was known for its efficiency and exceptional working skills. She had joined KITE from the beginning itself and the reason was her family's financial status which was very poor. She saw this employment as an opportunity and worked hard to achieve certain needs.

“In my situation, such a job offering was required because my family needed money. I am happy because I feel secured and safe. Now, I can gather a group of women for any activity and this became possible due to KM. I have no regrets as I am making enough income for the benefit of my family. It is this programme which saved me from declining.”

Case X: Suhana was doing her graduation when she got married. Even before marriage, she had joined KITE because of the family pressure experienced by her in such a young age. She regrets for discontinuing her education and after getting married, she never got enough opportunities to finish her graduation.

“I joined KITE because one of my relative pressurized my parents to get me employed in a SHG before getting married. I wanted to continue my education but due to family pressure and responsibilities, I could not complete anything.”

The researcher could also understand through the discussions that the regrets for taking such actions were mostly found amongst those women who could not gain enough monetary benefits from KITE. Also, the units that were not working efficiently found problems in other factors like heads of the departments, KM officials, group leaders and members which according to them had affected

their employment. The key informants and the group members, both stated that during the initial years of beginning this programme, there was less conflicts experienced by the group members because the units were working well with huge support from the Government. In the later stages, when most of the units started to close down, the anxiety created amongst them led to huge conflicts and further closing of certain units. Such examples were found in the districts of Malappuram, Kozhikode, Pathanamthitta, Wayanad, Kasargode and Palakkad. When related to the responses obtained based on the age group, the researcher found that women belonging to the age of 27 – 33 were not happy with their present situation and were trying to obtain other opportunities because they couldn't reach up to the levels they perceived to obtain. Women from the age group of 34 – 40 were struggling to survive and found solutions to the problems faced by their group and they had learned to accept the reality. It was noted that women who were above 40 years were settled with the job and were less enthusiastic in terms of obtaining any further openings. For them KITE was like their second home. Variations in the responses were also observed on the basis of the working status of the group. The groups which worked well and attained maximum profit lacked any complaints whereas in case of other groups, the members lacked proper motivation to sustain their group. But the index value of 42 shows a supporting environment for women.

Another factor explored in this study was related to their **confidence in confronting authorities and group mates for any mistakes done** by them. This is an essential quality which has to be acquired by women entrepreneurs because according to a key informant, to confront and accept one's mistakes makes a person strong and empowered. Through the data it was understood that 66 percent of the respondents confronted officials for any mistakes that had happened by them whereas 24 percent of them refuted from any such actions. Here, in this case, the researcher also found that around 10 percent of the women entrepreneurs were neutral on this aspects raising certain incertitude. Those who positively responded to the statement seemed responsible to the situations and the decisions taken on their behalf and others depended on such women who would meet officials for the common problems faced by the group members. Here also, the researcher could find a domination by the "superordinates" who took the role of guiding their fellow

members in undertaking such decisions. Those who negatively responded were mostly the followers of these leaders and they remain as passive beneficiaries of the *Kudumbashree* programme. Most of the respondents who were neutral stated that it was not their responsibility to confront officials because the decisions were taken by the group's leader. They defied from their role as a responsible entrepreneur who should work with other women entrepreneurs to sustain their livelihood. In the case of confronting their own groups for any mistakes, the researcher found that a huge number of women i.e. around 92 percent of them responded positively whereas no one answered negatively. 8 percent of them remained neutral which is a little less than the previous case. This factor shows that most of the members have liberty in interacting with their fellow mates. The informal relation maintained in the group has enhanced such an activity stimulating the members to share their problems easily with the other group mates. The researcher could also observe that the IT units were like their home because they shared a strong sense of togetherness and the presence of all sorts of essential materials ranging from utensils to induction stoves resembled a homely atmosphere. Most of the units lacked a professional atmosphere making it look like a house. Those who were neutral were not much attached to the group members due to certain conflicts which were not discussed in front of the researcher. But through the discussions the researcher recognized that they were mostly related to monetary aspects. The researcher has also added two cases which showcase the disparity observed in the field.

Case XI: Saranya was an independent women who determined her decisions. She was loud and assertive when it came to discuss such issues. She was a post graduate and her answers too lacked uncertainty.

“Usually when conflicts occur in our group or when we lag in completing the given task, we are sometimes communicated by the officials. Most of the time, it is me who represent my group during the discussions. I don't have fear in addressing them because it is the part of the job. If anything wrong is done by us, then it becomes our responsibility to clarify and correct it. The same is applicable in the group as in this group, we have created a system by which we all gather together and discuss the problems encountered by each member. Similarly, conflicts are also solved.”

Case XII: Jaya was looking at her leader most of the time during the discussions and even appreciated the patience, courage and confidence of her group leader. It was clear that she was dependent on the other member for the above stated attributes.

“I can’t face officials mainly because I don’t understand what they say. I am good in doing data entry but attending meetings is not my job. It can be done by those who are good at it.”

The gap experienced by the 24 percent of women respondents indicates that the officials of KM are still not accessible by most of the members but key informants stated that they always try to be approachable to these women entrepreneurs. The researcher could also understand that those women who lagged behind in acquiring such abilities mainly did not try to control their inhibitions and face the fear. They were used to the dependency they had towards the other dominating members of the respective groups. The index value of 29 for the former attribute shows a moderate condition for women whereas the later has an index value of 46 which indicates a supportive environment. The FGDs also helped the researcher to understand the prime role played by KM in enhancing such communicative skills of women by training them as entrepreneurs. These officials also nurtured and developed the presentation abilities of them which indicates that they empowered themselves by getting involved in the process prepared by KM.

6.5.3 Participative

This attribute defines the political empowerment of an individual in terms of their participation. The Table 6.12 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents based on their participation in various activities.

Table 6.12. Frequency distribution on Participation

S. No	Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage	Index (in percentage)
1.	I participate in the protest against women oppression.	Strongly agree	39	13.93	-29
		Agree	48	17.14	
		No opinion	04	1.43	
		Disagree	92	32.86	
		Strongly disagree	97	34.64	

2.	I regularly participate in Grama Sabha.	Strongly agree	115	41.07	56
		Agree	126	45	
		No opinion	08	2.86	
		Disagree	21	7.5	
		Strongly disagree	10	3.57	
3.	I am an active member of a political party.	Strongly agree	56	20	3
		Agree	90	32.14	
		No opinion	10	3.57	
		Disagree	65	23.21	
		Strongly disagree	59	21.07	
4.	My likelihood of voting has increased.	Strongly agree	108	38.57	66
		Agree	163	58.21	
		No opinion	00	00	
		Disagree	09	3.21	
		Strongly disagree	00	00	
5.	I plan to contest in local body election.	Strongly agree	45	16.07	-7
		Agree	65	23.21	
		No opinion	05	1.79	
		Disagree	134	47.86	
		Strongly disagree	31	11.07	

Source: Field work

It shows an individual who takes part in or becomes involved in an activity, service or programme to symbolize their decisions. This characteristic of an individual can be considered as a resultant feature of their involvement in the process of empowerment. Table 10.3 shows the frequency representation of the participation rate of these women in several activities.

Inducting women in the mainstream of development can be considered as the best way to empowerment (Lal, 2007). Sen (1984) takes a much wider view of development and states it as the process of expansion of entitlement which leads to rise in sustenance, self-esteem, capabilities and freedom. According to a key informant interview (2016) the development strategy for empowerment is mainly concerned with employment and asset creation through skill oriented education and vocational training but the researcher wanted to discover the social consciousness

assimilated by them as part of their involvement in Kudumbashree. The researcher enquired on their participation in case of **protests against women oppression**. Through the data obtained, it was found that around 31 percent of the respondents positively replied to the statement whereas 68 percent of them were negative. Even the index percentage is -29 which shows that the situation on this attribute is unsatisfactory with respect to these women entrepreneurs. Most of the women respondents declined from participating in such group activities because they were restricted, inhibited and constrained by the societal norms. Some of them were not interested in such activities because they viewed it as a medium for gaining attention, which was primarily required by the people who wanted to fulfil certain political agenda. The researcher could also understand that a very few of these women were not aware of any mass uprising happening for the sake of women empowerment. Such women usually were confined in their comfortable zones and saw it as the activities of those who had free time. Through the field study it was also discovered that those women who were active in such movements had wither participated in political campaigning or were active members of the local political groups. A very few of them were ward members or Panchayath members. Such experience with public had enhanced their status as a political visionary amongst the local group of women enriching their participation in mass activities. The researcher has also added two cases to demonstrate the difference in opinions as observed in the field.

Case XIII: Sheela was a Panchayath member and seemed very friendly with the researcher. According to her, the ability to interact and communicate her ideas were an aftereffect of the participation in Kudumbashree and thereafter in political matters of her locality. She was a proud political member and a social activist.

“Initially, it was impossible to even imagine a life with so much activities because I thought after marriage, my activities will be confined to the household work. But after joining KITE, there was a significant progress in my ability to interact and understand the matters happening around us. The skills I gained through the various sessions organized by them helped me to get into the societal activities. As I am an active political member of LDF, I do participate in such uprising to represent women issues and to enhance public awareness on women oppression.”

Case XIV: Ayisha was initially very reluctant in discussing the issues faced by the women entrepreneurs of KITE. She only spoke on the problem of delay in regular payment after completing the work. Rest of the time, she was quietly listening to the discussions and replied only when asked to. She was from a nuclear family and had two children to look after.

“It is not easy for me to participate in such functions because I am concerned about the religious and societal norms which are to be followed to survive in a society. My husband also doesn’t support such activities and believes that women who are not given proper socialization get into these kind of protests. ”

Most of the negative responses were obtained from Northern Kerala whereas women especially from Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam were very spontaneous with regard to such questions. The researcher identified that such qualities were imbibed by these women because of the social set-up prevailing in these two districts. Ernakulam is a cosmopolitan and metropolitan city and Thiruvananthapuram is the state capital district and the head offices of most of the Government departments are situated here, which gives ample opportunity for such women to participate in political activities and other associated events which mostly happen in these cities. Focus group discussions helped the researcher to understand that such qualities were acquired by them through the experience gained by their participation in *Kudumbashree*. KM is an organization that embarked the venture of associating women from rural areas into group activities or occupations and it is this nature of *Kudumbashree* which paved way for them to construct a meaning out of this or it could also be stated that the meaning of such cooperative links were defined to them by the officials of KM. The key informants also stated that some of the women amongst them adopted the meaning of their tasks and became leaders or “*superordinates*” whereas others followed them and went on to become “*subordinates*”.

The grama sabha is the grass root level democratic organisation in each Village Panchayath. For promoting transparency and accountability in public administration, planning and implementation of schemes, an effective functioning of grama sabha is required. Participation of women has been made mandatory with

the intention of addressing and hearing grievances which are exclusive for them. Such intentions can provide political leadership for women, eliminate gender discrimination and strengthen women empowerment programmes (Times of India, 2014). Kudumbashree is also involved in the execution of labour intensive projects which gives opportunity for women at the grass roots to come to the forefront at the local decision making process and to address concerns of gender equity in participation (Key informant, 2014). Community Development Society (CDS) of KM overview and mobilise the networking of Kudumbashree members in grama sabha. As this study obtained women from Kudumbashree as its respondents, the researcher has tried to know their **participation in grama sabha**. Through the data obtained, it was discovered that a huge number of women i.e. 86 percent regularly participated in grama sabha of their Panchayath and 11 percent of the respondents denied having participated regularly. All the dominant members of their respective made it a rule to actively get involved into decentralisation process by participating in such democratic institutions. Those who positively responded were aware of the wide range of possibilities available for them like they could discuss issues on mal nutrition, health and legal facilities meant for women and children. Such meetings could also address remedies and prevention of atrocities on women including domestic violence. Some of these respondents saw it as a platform to propagate KITEs and its activities so as to enhance their networking in community. Those respondents who negatively retorted to the statements were not interested in getting involved in such activities but rather preferred to be pre-occupied with household chores. Some of them didn't identify any need to be associated with their participation in grama sabha. The researcher has provided two cases that would explain the disparity observed in the field.

Case XV: Sajna was her group's leader and an experienced KITE member. She readily agreed to this query and even stated the various benefit of attending grama sabha. She seemed aware of the major functions of this local democratic structure and her family also supported her participation.

“This grass root democratic institution enhances transparency and is the best way for the BPL category people to forward the issues faced by them. Matters concerning women are also addressed and

discussed by the authorities. I am accompanied by one of my group mate to the sabha where we try to sometimes propagate the works done by our enterprise. ”

Case XVI: Sarojini seemed coy in discussing the matters related to her group’s working. She looked uninterested in the discussions as if it was another responsibility which has to be handled by her alone. She sat with her group but indirectly responded to most of the questions and some of her answers were echoes of her group mates.

“I am busy with my household chores and it is not possible for me to handle my job here at KITE and also to look after my home. There is no use in attending grama sabha because we didn’t find much impact on our payment when we met the KM authorities. All the government activities are lagged and it takes time for any positive change to occur. My group mates do participate in such meetings and if there is any urgency, I will be notified by them.”

Through the FGDs, it was identified that the concept and the ideology behind such group activities was introduced to these women by the KM. Before joining this venture, even though they were aware of Grama Sabha but could never recognize a need which would inspire them to attend such meetings. Some of the members have prior experience in participating in grama sabha with their family members but they never acquired a chance to indulge into the group activities on their own for their purpose. The key informants also stated that to amplify decentralised participation of women in democratic institutions, many steps were taken by the KM. *Kudumbashree* itself became a method to link LSGs with local community especially, economically and socially weak women. Most of the plan interventions of Village Panchayath and Urban Local Governments in the areas of poverty reduction and women’s development, use the CDS network as agency, especially in identification and selection of beneficiary, homing in an individual and collective means, and for community outreach (<http://www.kudumbashree.org/?q=lsginterface>). Those who still declined from participating in such social activities after such a long experience in its ventures were mainly passive receivers of its benefits. Such women mostly depended on their group leaders to survive in any group activity and denied undertaking dominant roles. The field work served the researcher in discovering that most of the women from the 14 districts of Kerala

participated in Grama Sabha but those who were seriously concerned were mostly from Thiruvananthapuram because of the availability and fast response on local queries by the government authorities. Such a situation is prevailing in Thiruvananthapuram because it is the capital city of Kerala and hence, supports many government departments and local agencies.

UNDP administrator Helen Clark (2012) stated that women's political participation is central to achieving the goals of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development of women for promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. Even though women form an active membership in political parties but very few reach leadership position. As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes, "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women." In case of India, the 73rd and 74th amendment prescribe regular elections every five years and the most revolutionary provision is the reservation of one-third of the seats for women in local bodies, along with reservation of seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their regional populations (Planning Commission report, 2007). Kudumbashree also demands enhancing women's political participation by making them visible in the local decision making process. Hence, the researcher has tried to identify whether these women are **actively involved in political parties**. This was to determine the impact of *Kudumbashree* group activities and associations have integrated them into a definite political regime. It was an enigmatic experience for the researcher because of the strenuous effort to probe into their political ideology. Most of the respondents were reluctant in sharing this view whereas some were unfolding these aspects spontaneously. 52 percent of the women positively responded to the statement indicating that approximately more than half of the respondents actively participate in political pursuits of the party they belonged to. A little less, i.e. 44 percent of them negatively responded declining any active association with any political party. The researcher through the FGDs, discovered that most of the women entrepreneurs had a clearly defined political ideology which they were hesitant to share with the

researcher. Those who were outspoken on these political aspects were known publicly as a member of a political party. Below are given two cases which demonstrate the disparity observed by the researcher in the field.

Case XVII: Radhika came to pick up researcher at the bus station and by observing her, it became transparent that she was a very dominant person in her region because most of the people walking besides us was acknowledging her. She was a Panchayath member and a strong follower of a political party.

“I am an active member of a political party and I joined them after I became a part of Kudumbashree. I got motivated by the several group activities and associations where a leadership ability is required. I noticed my abilities and got a chance to represent women by participating in the local elections. This has helped me to take responsible actions for my fellow members and the women folk of my community.”

Case XVIII: Susha was very hesitant in sharing her political views and even went onto tell the researcher that such a question was not required. She was already not interacting properly with the researcher and this question stopped her from responding more.

“I am not a member of any political party and I don’t think to survive in a society, we need to have a definite political ideology. I vote by looking at the quality of the political leader and not on their party.”

This question seemed to have raised certain doubts in the minds of these women, because most of the women were not sharing their political ideology with the researcher. They did speak on the outlay of their activity as more number of women participate in political ventures but they were silent on giving a definite appellation for the ideology being followed. Through the FGDs, it was identified that such political participation was the result of their involvement in the activities of *Kudumbashree*. The key informants also added to the above stated finding that the formulation exclusive NHGs for women are meant to bring women into the grama sabhas and to provide spaces for the participation in decentralised governance. Therefore, by the data gathered it can be concluded that the socialization process of KM plays a major role in leading these women into the

empowerment process. It was also noted during the field work that most of the women respondents from Thiruvananthapuram district were distinctively vocal in revealing their political ideology. Again, the reason is the status of this district as the capital of Kerala state and most of the political uprising of all the predominant political parties occur here paving a platform for these women to become aware of and to get involved in such political agendas.

According to BBC news (2015), it was in the year 2015 when the women in Saudi Arabia got their right to vote for the first time in history (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35075702>). In case of India, with the emergence of constitutional provisions through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, a huge impetus can be found in the participation rate of women. Kerala is the only state in the country where women outnumber men in population. But the state has not shown any gender parity while electing its MLAs. In the 140-member Assembly, only 8 are women this time, one seat higher than the last terms Assembly elections (The Hindu, 2016). This is an example of the fact that women still remain the underrepresented major social group. According to a leading newspaper report, around 78.29 percent women casted vote this election, while only 76.33 percent men exercised franchise (The Times of India, 2016) which shows that women outnumbered men in practicing suffrage. The researcher has also tried to understand whether the **likelihood of voting has increased** amongst these women entrepreneurs because the basic procedure of political agenda is manifested through adult franchise. Through the field study it was observed that a huge number of women i.e. 97 percent have experienced higher frequency of participation in voting whereas a very few of them i.e. 3 percent responded negatively. They saw it as their right and duty to select the appropriate government that would represent them. Those who responded negatively were basically passive beneficiaries of *Kudumbashree*. They were not aware of any amplification in their ability to cast vote because of their participation in KITE. Some of them refused any progress with regard to their process of voting even without a proper reasoning. The researcher has also added two cases to demonstrate the disparity.

Case XIX: Najma was an active member of a small group of KITE. Her unit was located in a confined room with very little space to sit. But all the members of her seemed active and smart in terms of answering the interview questions. They all had their own political ideology and everyone in their group believed in adult franchise.

“It is our duty to participate in the process of nominating a government that would represent us. I am always supported by my family and friends in this process. I can never refuse to participate in the process of voting. It gives us a chance to make a decision and manifest it in the form of action. All these changes was possible because of our active participation in Kudumbashree.”

Case XX: Sumitha was already reluctant in discussing on the political ideology followed by her and she also refused from explaining her duty as a citizen to cast her vote. She seemed to have no interest in taking such decisions because according to her all political agendas are meant for the self – interest of respective political leaders.

“I don’t find any purpose in practicing adult franchise. All political leaders seem to be the same. I used to vote before but later I stopped because I can’t find any relevant changes occurring in and around us. Even though Kudumbashree has improved our social participation and decision making abilities but this is my own personal decision.”

Through key informant interviewing, it was identified that they focussed on helping women who leave behind their traditional roles as passive cadres of political parties and move up in the proper understanding of political roles as well as responsibilities. All the respondents were aware that such rights and responsibilities are meant for them to choose deserving candidates to occupy the roles of decision makers. Through the FGDs, it was understood that KM had a major function of establishing socio-political awareness amongst women to organize them into different set of roles so that they learn the basics of group dynamics and decision making. It was these factors which supported them to acquire the organizing skills of an entrepreneur and to enhance community participation for local development. Even the index score of 66 percent shows a favourable state for women.

The Hindu in its article titled '*Kudumbashree flag flies high*', published on October 19, 2015, reported that more than 10,000 women were drawn from the Kudumbashree movement to participate in the elections last year. It was also stated that all major political parties, including the CPI (M), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), harvested candidates from the Kudumbashree movement. The collective, from which some 1,200 women got elected to various local government institutions in the 2010 elections, has helped women to move from their traditional role as passive cadres of political parties and acquire a definite status in the political hierarchy to claim the coveted space of decision-makers. Also, from key informants of KM, the researcher understood that the skills imparted to these women made them an important task force to accomplish the political agendas of such parties. In this study, the researcher has tried to delineate the factor concerned with their **plan to contest in local body elections**. Most of the respondents didn't have any immediate plans to do the same but had certain plans in the future if circumstances allowed. 39 percent of the respondents positively agreed to the statement whereas 59 percent of them negatively responded stating that they don't have any plans for competing in local elections. This was contradictory on what was expected from the field by the researcher as most of the news report during the previous year elections indicated that women from Kudumbashree were preferred by the political parties to represent them in elections. In case of this programme, it was viewed that only a very few of them intended to take part in elections. The researcher has added two cases which demonstrate the difference found in the field.

Case XXI: Sunitha was already an active political party member from her region. She was willing to go for elections next time also as she believed that it was her duty to support women and help them with the required assistance. She was very friendly and approachable as she took the researcher to all the places where her group members were working.

"I was already interested in politics and Kudumbashree paved a way for me to test my abilities. The essential skills imparted by the officials are the prime reason behind where I stand now. I will

surely participate in elections as long as get support from my fellow members and public.”

Case XXII: Sarada was from a poor background as it was visible from her appearance. She was a hardworking member as stated by the group members. Her husband was not well and hence, it was her responsibility to handle all the household chores but all these didn't cease her from working hard. She was a dominating member of her district and controlled most of the activities of her group. She was determined to survive because she had no other way.

“I do have a political ideology but I don't intend to participate in an election because I don't find any need for the same. I work because I have to earn for the survival of my family and then I can't get involved in any political movements.”

Through the discussions, the researcher understood that here also the role played by KM was notable because all the women discussed the positive effects of their participation in *Kudumbashree*. The kind of work and experience gained by them through their participation had upheld their position in society. Also, their association with IT gave them further impetus because during the early 2000s, only a few programmes were concerned with ICT. Most of the women from Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Kottayam and Idukki were interested in such activities. But the index value of -7 shows an unfavourable situation for women respondents which is contrary to the information obtained from literature survey. Such a lag amongst these programme members would be the result of the lack of attention and dedication obtained by them from KM as from 2012 onwards they separated from Kudumbashree and made an independent agency in the name of Unnathi IT Consortium.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has defined social, economic and political empowerment using indicators. Core social transactions and relations were uncovered through this chapter. The researcher also got an insight into the social networks existing amongst the women respondents. The chapter provides frequency distribution charts on various indicators based on the responses collected from the

280 respondents. Every indicator and its associated findings was supported by two contradictory cases which showcase the deviations found in the field. Certain complex phenomenon were found in the field and were studied in depth using ethnomethodological tools like conversation analysis and walking analysis. One of the prime observations that this chapter puts forward is “instrumental solidarity” which has been defined by the researcher under the indicator “Instrumental”. This chapter is followed by a rigorous attempt to discuss the conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Introduction

The last chapter of this study summarises the findings obtained, reflecting upon the research journey and addressing the research questions. This chapter also presents the contributions of the research towards theory and policy. The chapter further examines the limitations of the study and discusses the scope of future research in this area of study.

7.2. The background

Although the adoption of ICT in the public sector started as early as in the 1970s but it was only in the year 2000 when ICT obtained at least a little reference in the global scenario by the launch of UN's MDGs which was adopted to anchor efforts to combat poverty (Clarke et.al, 2013). Over the lifespan, there has been a growing interest around ICTs for Development (ICT4D) along with many studies which are based on the premise that ICT can contribute to the improvement of socio-economic conditions on developing countries (Sahay, 2001; Walsham et al., 2007). The UNDP report (2001) seeks to present a clear association between the 'enabling' development effects through technology, giving special attention to ICT particularly the Internet (Avgerou, 2003). There is an implicit assumption towards the development potential of ICT, which range from the construction of technology applications suitable for developing countries to facilitating the expansion of technologies (Kraemer et.al, 2009). Human capabilities such as a healthy life, knowledge, creativity, and participation in the social, economic, and political life of a community can be enhanced by technological innovations and it impacts the economic growth through productivity gains (Avgerou, 2003). The United Nations sponsored World Summit on the information society held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis during the year 2005 (Gopakumar, 2014) recognized the phenomenon of

digital divide as a global crisis which became a turning point for the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based artefacts and for overcoming the digital divide (WSIS, 2003a).

In India, the main thrust for governance with the utilization of ICT was initiated with the establishment of NICNET in the year 1987 which is the national satellite based computer network. NICNET depicts the institutional ICT Network of NIC which has since 1976 emerged as a “prime builder” of e-governance applications up to grassroots level as well as a promoter of digital opportunities for sustainable development (GOI, 2012). But, it was during the Tenth plan (2002-2007), when a scheme on “IT for Masses” was formulated for the dissemination and induction of new technology, mostly in the focal areas of infrastructure and services, electronic governance, education and mass campaign for IT awareness. Due to the vast spectrum of activities to be undertaken and acute fund constraints, first four years were mainly concerned towards telemedicine and digital library. It was during the year 2006-2007, when scheme projects were initiated for empowerment of women and development of SCs/STs. This scheme again attained impetus after restructuring, to focus on women empowerment and uplifting of SC/STs through ICT in the Eleventh plan (2007-2012). It was already discussed in the study that in India, the enthusiasm for ICT was both a product and fuel for the economic liberalisation programme. Now, the core for these aspirations were the huge profits made by the Indian software and the IT services sector (Walsham, 2010). This success illustrated the possibilities of a technology that can fundamentally address two major problems in its economy- lack of industrial and export growth and unemployment. ICT was seen as the best “tool” to enable the pro-liberal reforms within government because of the larger background of liberalisation and the state’s move to take up a non-interventionist role (Gopakumar, 2014). ICT was thus “the great legitimiser” (Noir and Walsham, 2007) and an integral part of the reforms programme. These reforms of 1991 criticised bureaucracy as an organizing form of Government and adopted practices to digitize government services. Besides these structural transformations, a great deal of attention was given specifically in constructing new techno-organizational structures within a given local social context (Avgerou, 2008). The assumptions

behind the introduction of such new forms of technologies, was the notion of integration of technologies which seemed to move the world towards converged systems. This convergence is based on technological innovations in microelectronics, computers and telecommunications. There is an extensive collection of literature, discussed in the previous chapters, that elucidates the emergence of ICTs as an empowering tool on the National agenda with the development of various ICT policies by several state governments.

Social transformation demands equal access to ICTs but the prevailing inequalities throughout the world suggest that many groups are hindered by their social and economic circumstances from developing a relationship with ICT (Wamala, 2012). There are enough empirical evidences that showcases gender digital divide depicting the lesser use of ICT by women when compared to men (Huyer and Carr, 2002; Primo, 2003; Lie, 2006). The Governments have promoted the micro and small scale enterprise as engines of growth for advancing the economic empowerment of women while reducing poverty and gender inequality (UNCTAD, 2014). The motivation for the initiation of such ICT enabled gender focussed small scale enterprises stems from the philosophies of the reforms movement converged with human development paradigm that got prominence during the late 1990s. There is widespread literature discussed in the preceding chapters to demonstrate the substantial resources allocated by various countries and multilateral agencies for establishing such microenterprises which intend to play a crucial role in ensuring the survival of poor households by enhancing women's confidence, skills and socioeconomic status with social benefits accruing to the community and future generations.

They gained prominence especially for use in document cataloguing and archiving (Liu and Yuan, 2015) because the formation of such microenterprises was considered as the most effective strategic approach to augment empowerment and enable gender equality by socializing them into ICT. However, in the process, the degree of attention, the extent of resources and investments and the scope of progress of women through ICTs have been identified as an underdeveloped means for women empowerment (UN, 2013). While the empirical and theoretical research in these areas has been growing over the past years, but there are a few literature

focussed on the fundamental aspects of these ICT programmes handled by the Governments.

It is against the above mentioned background that this study was undertaken to unfold the process of innovation, translation, social transactions and the various dimensions associated with the notion of empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The study was done specifically on the gender focussed ICT programmes initiated by the Government of Kerala. The review of literature helped the researcher in uncovering the various conceptual understandings and underlying assumptions connecting women empowerment and ICT. Apart from empowerment issues, the research has also focussed on identifying the constraining and liberating factors that affect the productivity of women entrepreneurs.

7.3. The study

This study has tried to address the primary research question: *Do Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala hold the strategic approach to enhance women's capabilities?* and related sub-questions: *What led to the genesis of the Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?; How does Government ICT programme for women construct empowerment in its social, economic and political domains?* and *What are the controlling and liberating factors affecting women due to the adoption of Government ICT programmes for women in Kerala?*

The concept of ICT, diffusion and innovation as used by Avgerou (2008) gave analytical strength to the process of analysis. The studies of Kabeer (1999; 2000; 2001; 2005; 2012) guided in constituting the operational definitions of social, economic and political empowerment. Expert advices and key informant discussions also contributed to strengthen the conceptual base of the present study. This conceptualisation succeeded in capturing the complexities associated with the social circumstances of these institutional actors. The research came across Kudumbashree IT enterprises (KITEs) as the only Government initiated ICT programme for women. Introduction of KITEs as data entry networks was analysed as attempted translations. The concept of functional simplification and associated organisational structuring showed how the process of production was practiced. Many data entry units were at the threshold of termination due to the lack of

efficient human intermediation to represent KITEs. In this way, the study has not only highlighted the difficulties associated with these attempts but also highlighted the various complexities linked to achieve sustainability.

The research has adopted an explanatory cohort interpretive embedded case study method and employs mixed method approach for the conduct of research. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed as part of the study. For the purpose of the research, the state of Kerala was stratified into north, central and south regions based on its geographic features and the whole 63 KITEs were studied with five or more women entrepreneurs in each group. 280 respondents between the age group of 25-60 years, who formed the members of Kudumbashree IT enterprises having more than five years of experience became the sample of this study. The required data was obtained from the four field based activities which are interviewing, observing, collecting and examining (materials), and feeling (Yin, 2011). PRA tools like historical timeline, daily routine analysis, Venn diagrams were also employed as part of the study. This approach gave opportunities for an in-depth understanding of the various socio-economic and political dimensions of empowerment experienced by these women entrepreneurs of KITEs.

7.4. Induction

The research framework succoured in understanding the institutional and organisational characteristics associated with the KITEs. It was identified that the conceptualisation of KITEs was the outcome of various social reforms and structural changes that occurred during the early 1990s beginning with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 which intensified the urge for decentralised planning. As discussed earlier, techno-organizational structures in the form of microenterprises were basically planned to be constructed in a given local social context. Such microenterprises were formulated based on three notions; problem solving; gap filling and emerging opportunity. For an intricate understanding on the institutional fabrication, sociology of translation was employed. This approach showed the mechanism or the process by which various actors interact to build or change networks in such a way that certain actors are able

to control others (Stanford, 2006). As discussed in the preceding chapters, four moments of translation – problematisation, interessement, enrollment and mobilisation described the formation of KITEs.

Women beneficiaries who became entrepreneurs of these cooperative enterprises were recruited based on their age and human capital. They were also supposed to have good entrepreneurial abilities, ICT skills and understand the potential of ICT for social change (Heeks, 1999a; Cecchini and Raina, 2002; Cecchini, 2003). It was obvious from the research that the most determining factor which mobilized labour into this collective agency was the dynamics of maximizing profit through the appropriation of capital acquired. The labour power was sold to produce capital intending to maintain the worker and her family.

The relation of production was initially under the control of the focal actor – KM which made itself indispensable by institutionalising the mechanisation of data. They provided essential support in the form of canvassing data entry tasks and providing personality development workshops. As stated before, three categories of KITEs were formed to enhance coherence and self – dependence; consulting enterprises; processing enterprises and hardware assembling enterprises (Duncombe et.al, 2005). These women entrepreneurs were free off relations of productions, hence were forced to depend on KM for the sale of labour power. There was an ideological hegemony of KM over these collectivity which controlled the commodity production. Here, commodity resembles digitized form of electronic data from the various government departments. The commodity was purchased at sufficiently low rates which proved advantageous for the government. This process of automation was also paving control over bureaucratic rationale of file keeping and administration as the huge government data was getting both organized and digitized at the same time (Cordella and Tempini, 2011) through these KITEs.

It was also noted in the research that there were certain sequence of events which affected the integrity and coherence of these KITEs. As described earlier, it was mainly after 2006, when major setbacks were experienced in the form of work deficit, closing of Vidyashree IT units, financial instability and broadening of Akshaya project into government service delivery agency. During the year 2012,

KM withdrew from the role of focal actor with the intention of integrating the whole IT enterprises into a single entity. Therefore, it was identified that there were a multiple events which caused enormous institutional changes in the form of disruptions and formations. Hence, this phenomenon was defined as “avalanche effect” for the purpose of defining the significant output changes occurred in the process of production due to certain small sudden multiple changes in the form of inputs.

KITEs were conceived to provide a range of data entry services to the government in the form of digitized information cataloguing. Drawing from the experiences from KITEs - the only existing ICT programme for women, initialized by the Government of Kerala, the study gives evidence that the lack of continuous monitoring and follow up measures have led to certain critical disruptions in the structural characteristics of the programme. With upgrading the ICT skills of these women, the founding organization did not consider it as a necessity to customize ICT services with respect to their potential. Digitization of government data cannot be contemplated as an everlasting means for employment. It is required to upgrade the services provided for these KITEs. Studies show that there is steady decrease in the use of technology for data cataloguing, archiving and online data transaction (Liu and Yuan, 2015). As a result, some of the IT units, in the year 2016, acquired e-seva services of Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) but still, there were cases of internal conflicts reported by them during field work. It was also interesting to note that the major factor which merged them with KITEs was the phenomenon of collective consciousness (Rueschemeyer, 1982).

7.5. Adaptation

Based on the study, the implications of the various constraining and liberating factors are also discussed. These factors got manifested in the form of structural barriers, individual deficiencies and capabilities. Amongst constraining factors, it was work deficit, financial instability and family conflict which were reported by more than half of the respondents as serious issues interrupting the process of production. As discussed before, it was the financial need that was overriding almost all other needs which provoked them to maximize profit by

buying the labour power of other women who were not the actual participants enrolled in the programme. These women were employed for the fast completion of the enormous data entry tasks. These newly recruited women were temporary labourers who were free to sell their labour. It was a remarkable observation made in case of some groups through field work which revealed the class antagonisms existing between these two groups of women. The new recruits were highly proficient in computer knowledge when compared to others and demanded prompt process of wage distribution which altered the base structure of certain IT units. There were also internal conflicts between groups on the basis of gained profits and loss.

Another factor to be discussed is the label of unskilled labour associated with these women which hindered their customer base and professional outlook. Though they lacked highly qualified professional background, they are now enough experienced in the field of data entry services. As discussed earlier, this experience couldn't help them because of their professionally deprived state. It was noted in the study, that the three problems of work deficit, financial instability and unskilled labour was interconnected. It was the professional lack that caused work deficit, which in turn led to financial instability and due to this inconsistency, they were incapable to upgrade their means of production.

It is also necessary to discuss another major factor which draws attention on the encompassing structures of gender. Deviation from the stereotypical gender specific traditional roles and responsibilities were the prime causes for these problems. Daily routine analysis proved beneficial for the study as the intricate deviations in their routine during normal and heavy work load was discovered. It was noted that these women worked more than the socially necessary labour time for the commodity production, especially during heavy work load. Now, the source of family conflict was the extended surplus labour time which was recognized as deviance that is innovative in terms of Merton (1949). Apart from this reason, it is required to understand that irregular wage form followed by the agency also caused disruptions in their family. Hence, this lack of flow of continuous financial capital in exchange of the surplus labour was another factor identified in the study.

Other factors like poverty, political hindrance, geographical location, religion and unstructured nature of these enterprises were some of the major issues which restrained the functionality of this collectivity. Amongst these problems, it was noted that geographical location and structural deficiency were indicated as crucial aspects associated with the production system of KITEs. Integration of services through a single window like *Akshaya* had also hampered the market system of these enterprises.

In case of liberating factors, the study focussed on the aspects that could emancipate the act of production. It was found that status upgradation, social networks, flexible labour, spatial mobility and capital accumulation formed major liberating factors. The study uncovered two types of status perceived and pursued by the respondents – “group status” and “social status”. It was conflicting to analyse the distinctions between the two types. The former signifies the monopoly over the mode of production whereas the later depicts the social honour claimed by pursuing contemporary patterns of consumption and lifestyle. It is also necessary to discuss the formation of two quasi opposite interests. It designates the discrepancy between some having position of power and others subordinated to position of command. These quasi groups were inter-group and intra-group aggregate of members with latent and manifest interests. It was stimulating to analyse the conversations and observe the social interactions which evidently showed the presence of two groups - “leaders” and “followers” who are referred to as “superordinates” and “subordinates” (Dahrendorf, 1959). The conflict caused by this authority structure was more inter-group in nature.

Social networking was another essential beneficial factor uncovered by the study. It is essential to understand that it was their association with the KM which led to the formation of the existing widespread social network. It was one of the prerequisites which demonstrated the entrepreneurial capabilities of these women. It also acted as one of the indispensable quality to be pursued by every women entrepreneur as it could aid them in securing the process of production by ensuring continuous availability of data entry works. It was also noted in the study that the superordinates showed their supremacy through the gathered relations required for sustaining the production process. It was interesting to find that the strength of

networks elevated their status amongst this collectivity. Moreover, they were active in using social networking sites and applications as well, like Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp which shows the extent of their access in ICT.

Flexible labour was introduced to provide employment to majority of the downtrodden educated women. The feature of “flexitime” was proved beneficial as they could devote their most productive hours to work and effectively manage both work and family responsibilities (Chung, 2015). Spatial mobility was another factor that was the direct implication of the rise in social capital and networking. It was observed that this factor enhanced the capability of these women entrepreneurs as they proved their self-dependence. It was discussed before, that capital accumulation which includes – social capital, financial capital, human capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital and political capital formed certain crucial factors showcasing the impact of their participation in *Kudumbashree*. Venn diagrams were used for an in-depth understanding on the associated phenomenon. As stated in the preceding chapters, they preferred financial capital the most but acquired social capital. This demonstrates their inclination towards the control over financial capital – a distinctive feature of capitalism.

This study has showcased an inexorable process of adaptation discovered amongst these women, leading to the survival of the existing 63 KITEs. It was noted that amongst them, a new class of “petty bourgeoisie” was in the state of development which demonstrated the inception of an evolving dichotomy, widening the gap between the “superordinates” and “subordinates”. This gap was based on their control over the mode of production and capital accumulation. Those who adapted with the constraining and liberating factors still sustain whereas those who lacked the ability to adapt themselves, perished. It was this capability which led to empowerment.

7.6. Formation

Empowerment is a widely discussed topic of a number of studies which attempt to quantify empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Mitter, 2004, Kabeer et.al, 2008). In this study, an intensive exploration was done to perceive the contextual understanding of empowerment. In this study, empowerment was explained as the

process of implementing agency in the social system where the plurality of actors interact with each in a physical environment to achieve valued ways of what Kabeer (2000) refers to as “being and doing”. This approach helped the researcher in understanding the phenomenon of empowerment collective – organizational structure within the three domains – social, economic and political. Insights from various literature and discussions with the subject experts, key informants and authors succoured to construct and define indicators for all the three categories of empowerment. These indicators were further defined using sub-indicators, especially for analytical clarity. This method helped the interpretive approach of the study for gathering a comprehensive knowledge regarding the factor. Likert’s five point scale was used to quantitatively analyse the data.

In this research, social empowerment was explained using six indicators – reflexive, expressive, futuristic, social capital, mobility and group solidarity. Social empowerment depicts the process involving both internal and external change that finds expression in the ability to “look at self”, act and implement the practical knowledge, the information, skills, perform collective actions and construct an environment for undistorted communication. For an in-depth intricate understanding, certain case studies were also explained relevant to the topic of enquiry. It was interesting to find that group solidarity followed by mobility and expressiveness dominated all other social indicators. The least gathered feature was reflexive even though they had concrete awareness on rights and responsibilities. It is also required to discuss one key factor of disparity found in the displayed leadership qualities. Certain women were discovered in almost all groups who demonstrated exceptional abilities of giving orders and controlling the discussions between them which proves that such abilities were not getting acquired uniformly between these women entrepreneurs. They represent the class of women belonging to the quasi group “superordinates”. It has to be noted that the presence of such quasi groups as discussed before, resulted less class antagonisms because their pent up emotional energy was channelled properly within a group. Also, the chances of solving the various individual issues and problems were mostly discussed and solved in a group i.e. a single KITE. It was also very interesting to realize that such a class legitimacy originated from the derived need against the vulnerability and

structural strain of the group which sanctioned power to a more able person who has imbibed the required institutional ideology and skills. There was another factor identified amongst group members which demonstrated consciousness of unity accompanied by a feeling of separation from other groups. This separation was mostly inter-district and could be compared to Marx's notion of "class in itself". In case of some groups, there was a feeling of rising hostility towards others showing the characteristics of "class for itself". As this distinction was found within the same class and collectivity participating in the same production process, hence, in this study, it was conceived as "group in itself" and "group for itself".

Economic empowerment represented the process of accumulating capital through the collective labour performed to exercise greater control over forces of production, relations of production and life choices. Four indicators used for a better conceptual understanding were: instrumental, human capital, producer and progressive aspects of an individual. The factor of progressive dominated the rest of the attributes showcasing the conceived new knowledge and management capabilities with regard to economic transactions. It is essential to discuss a very stimulating phenomenon conceived and defined as "instrumental solidarity" in this study. It was interesting to note that the solidarity reflected in the field response, was actually a manifestation of the need to achieve capital. They were rationally inclined towards forming a collective identity guided by reason and calculation that would act as the required means to achieve the desired end – profit accretion. As discussed before, it was the financial which dominated the most than other needs. As seen before, there was a movement from absolute deprivation to relative deprivation due to already widening gap between the "haves" and "have nots".

Political empowerment represents the process of transformation from a passive to an active state reinforcing the ability to determine the direction of change in case of circumstances and events. In this study, political empowerment was explained using three indicators namely administrative, accountable and participant. Amongst these three factors, accountability dominated followed by administrative and participant features. This finding indicates the abilities of these women respondents to hold themselves responsible for their actions. It was noted that such self-dependence was predominant amongst women who handled

leadership roles. It is also required to consider the responses of some women who were mostly unsatisfied with their condition. It was interesting to understand that women entrepreneurs belonging to the age group of 27-33 years were disappointed upon their actions of participating in KITEs and were in search of other opportunities whereas women from the age group of 34 – 40 years were struggling to survive and sustain their production process. It was amazing to observe that respondents above 40 years were settled with the job. They accepted the reality and retreated from obtaining any further prospects.

In this research, the concept of empowerment was observed in detail and studied deeply to uncover the intricate and multiple ways in which power operates in the domain of empowerment. It was noted that the process of adaptation gave rise to the ability of realizing one's intention even against the resistance of others (Swatos and Kaelbar, 2016). There was already a studied and memorized definition of empowerment learned through their association with the activities of *Kudumbashree* but it was stimulating to discover the subjective interpretation of empowerment which endured them to pursue their labour even after several interruptions. Hence, through this study the concept of empowerment was reconstructed and defined as “sustainment” because it was this factor, according to them, which determined the survival of any individual. It was this degree of sustainment which defined empowerment for them.

The researcher was also interested to analyse the process of empowerment quantitatively. Hence, the researcher adopted a simple mathematical formulation wherein each of the sub-indicators under the main indicators under the prime indicators were equally weighed to obtain an overall percentage. The obtained value then shows the percentage of empowerment in each aspect of empowerment. As the Likert's five point scale is defined such that if the respondents respond negatively, then there are chances to obtain negative output which shows adverse conditions of empowerment. The maximum possible empowerment is hence, the case where all these questions are answered in the most positive way. The calculated data showed 47.91 percentage for the factor of social empowerment achieved out of the maximum possible entity. Regarding economic empowerment, 34.92 percentage is the maximum obtained value by the respondents and political empowerment has

26.4 percentage which is the maximum gathered value for the entity. This also verifies the data qualitatively obtained through the field. This can even be extended to a much better system by providing accurate weightage to each sub-indicator but it requires a very thorough study and seemed out of its scope.

7.7. Contributions of the study

7.7.1. Theoretical contribution

Studies on government ICT programmes for women empowerment have very rarely discussed the inception and underlying ideologies which led to the formation of such gender specific enterprises. This study has traced the conceptualisation of ICT enterprises meant for empowering women and digitizing government departments simultaneously. This study also portrays the initiation of innovation for the integration of government with development agencies like Kudumbashree Mission. The notion of translation employed for the first time uncover the in-depth structural dimensions that led to the formation of institutional dynamics in the form of KITE. The study has also enquired on the various structural deficiencies which hinder the increase in the number of government programmes focussed on ICTs. As discussed before, integration of services through a single window like *Akshaya* has also hampered the market system of these enterprises.

The concept of “avalanche effect” was perceived in the study as a significant change in the output as a result of small variations in multiple inputs that were required for the unperturbed functioning of the process of production. It explains the deviations and obstructions that has occurred in the production system of KITEs due to the impact of multiple events arising within a short period of time. In the case of disruptions appearing in multiple inputs, there is a huge possibility for the group to breakdown. As discussed in previous chapters, the more resilient features the group possessed, the less was their chances of disintegration. The researcher could identify such factors through group discussions and interviews. The notion of “instrumental solidarity” was conceived through the research, which demonstrates the collective identity guided by reason and calculation to rationally achieve the determined end of accumulating capital. It was based on the

interpretation of Weber's typology of social action and Durkheim's philosophy on solidarity.

It is also essential to discuss one of the prime finding of the study which extends its scope to understand the failure of upcoming entrepreneurial activities. There was a movement from absolute deprivation to relative deprivation due to already widening gap between the "haves" and "have nots". It designates the discrepancy between some, having position of power and others subordinated to position of command. These quasi groups were inter-group and intra-group aggregate of members with latent and manifest interests. They were designated as "superordinates" and "subordinates" (Dahrendorf, 1959). The conflict caused by this authority structure was more inter-group in nature and the authority structure was determined by the control over the mode of production. It outlines the emphasis of Marx on capitalism with the inherent dynamics of maximizing profit as in bourgeoisie society. Marx's concept of class struggle was also extended to discuss the class consciousness existing within the same class.

An important factor considered in the study was the reconstruction of the conceptual understanding of empowerment. Though empowerment has been researched, defined and redefined several times, but through this study, it was a more perpetual and interminable factor which manifested itself from the ground of the study. The process of empowerment as stated in most of the studies deals with the awareness of any of the five needs – social, material, self-esteem, physiological and security, which leads to the most effective form of action that can produce any of the six capital – social, financial, human, political, cultural and symbolic which advances to the implementation of agency in the social system of the actor. The Figure 7.1 shows the reconstructed notion of empowerment, conceived through this study.

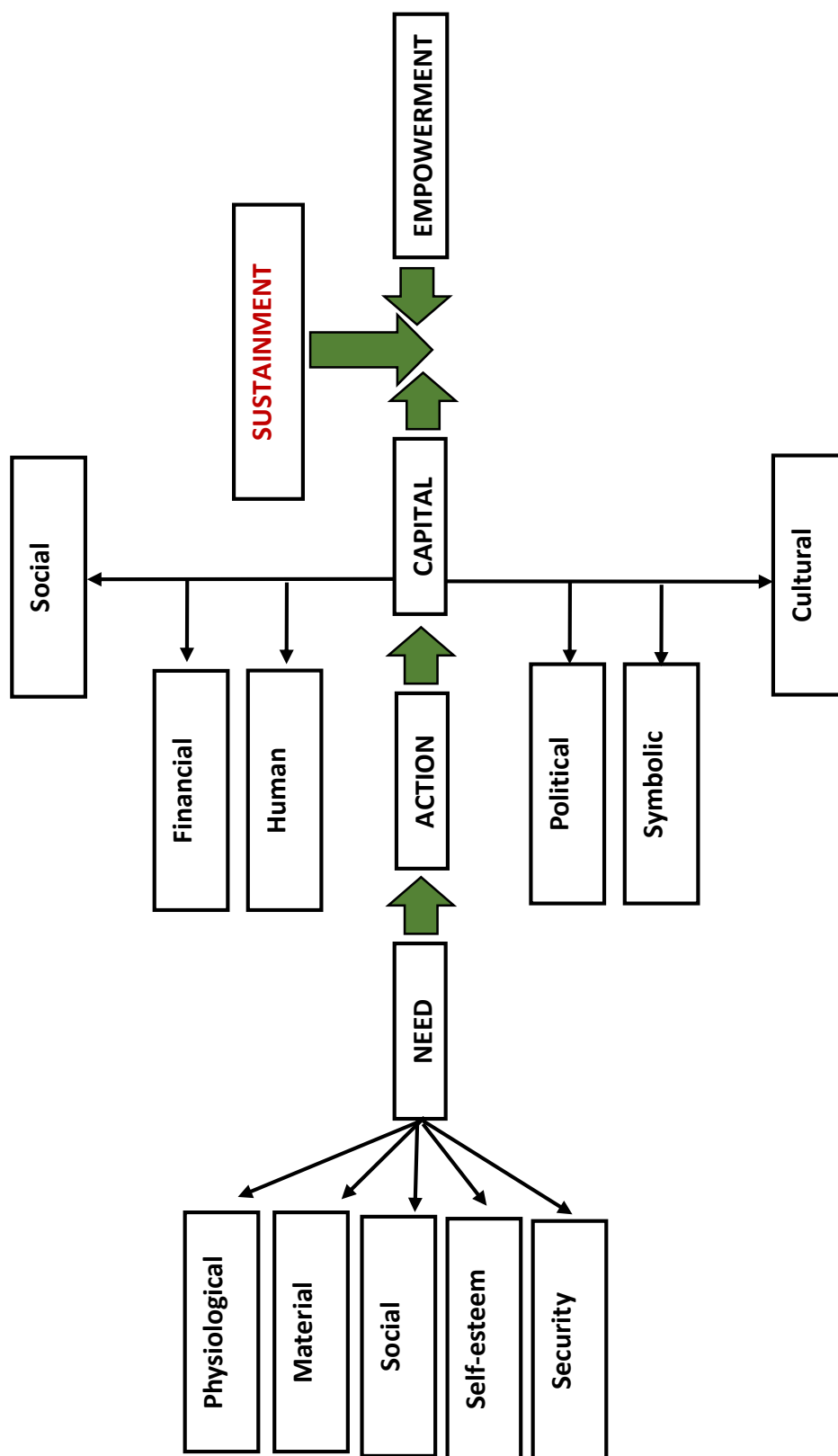


Figure 7.1. Empowerment Redefined

Through this research another concept called as “sustainment” was identified which shows the actor’s continuity over time in the social, economic and political sphere. It is this legitimization which progresses towards empowerment and in a way symbolizes empowerment itself. Through the analysis, the researcher found that the present definitions of empowerment used in various studies are incapable of elucidating the causes which led to the collapse of the once empowered entities. Hence, it was a necessity to contain the overall dimensions of empowerment and define it in terms of one of the most important element – the time. It is in this context where the concept of “sustainment” was introduced in order to broaden the extent of empowerment. Therefore, the empowerment matrix is reinforced by the structure of sustainability. It is this structure of sustainability which gives life and form to empowerment. The findings of the study provides various learnings and contributions towards the influence of ICT on the production system and social dynamics of these women entrepreneurs. It is required to state the exceptional abilities of the KITEs belonging to the districts of Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram which demonstrated most of the signs of empowerment when compared to others.

7.7.2. Policy contributions

This study provides sound analytical framework to policy makers on the various institutional inconsistencies and structural deficiencies experienced by the ICT programme of Kerala. Discussions were also held with the policy makers to ensure their awareness on the present state of such women entrepreneurs. Below are some of the suggestions and recommendations formulated as part of the research, through discussions and literature review.

7.7.2.1 Suggestions and Recommendations

- Online single Communication Window handled by KITEs
 - Ticket reservation (KSRTC)
 - Mobile service connection
 - DTH service connection
 - Land phone connection
 - LPG booking

- Kerala Online Shopping
 - Site maintained and handled by KITEs
 - An all-encompassing Marketing agency for Government products and ensuring delivery in all districts of Kerala (as pilot project)
 - Products like agriculture vegetative propagation, Hantex, Kerala Khadi Products, Handicrafts, food products etc.
- Kudumbashree Toll free number
 - Under the title 'KITE for all', an agency for handling the tradesperson database of all Kerala
 - Can be situated in every district
 - Authorized and handled by GOK
 - Women friendly
- Improved advertisements
- Propagating Kudumbashree ideologies through documentaries

These demonstrate the different opportunities that can be utilized for the betterment of women. Aspects of monitoring and follow up activities have also been discussed in the study, in the previous chapters. A better working environment and structured system can help them in propagating their field of expertise.

7.8. Limitations of the study

This study has adopted theoretical foundations from a variety of allied field and it was challenging for the researcher to employ these methodologies given the nature of the research questions.

The period for data collection extended for more than 2 years due to the employment of multiple tools which were aimed at acquiring intense information on the targeted questions. It was very difficult to trace the respondents of the study due to the lack of proper data on their locations. Most of them were initially inhibited which forced the researcher to conduct more discussions in order to probe into the realities. It was challenging to obtain information on political hindrances as most of the respondents even during discussions withdrew from identifying their political backgrounds.

7.9. Areas for further research

This study can be extended as a comparative analysis of various other ICT programmes existing in Kerala. An empowerment model can be constructed by further researching the different entrepreneurial activities. Identical methodologies and theoretical foundations can be utilized to understand the functioning of other ICT programmes. An in-depth study can be done on the factors affecting the sustainability of the ICT programmes for women in Kerala. The applicability of the phenomenon conceived through this study has to be widened by doing further research on other fields.

7.10. Reflections

This research journey was a part of my interest in unveiling the latent dynamics of interaction between technology, organisations and people. The research topic was narrowed down to ICT programmes for women in Kerala considering the feasibility of the study. The study and research experience have been very fulfilling. The research and outlook of my study was the result of my interactions with the various policy makers and field experts.

The study gave me an opportunity to visit and interact with the first ICT women entrepreneurs of Kerala. It was an enriching moment for me as I could understand the initial state of technology when compared to today's fast global world. Even though they faced a lot of disruptions with regard to their work, but it was easy for me to identify the still existing initial momentum and motivation. Some of the respondents became very emotional during the interviews and discussions, which provoked me to work rigorously for the betterment of them. All the women entrepreneurs of KITE were very welcoming and friendly which aided me to communicate my ideas freely. I was even motivated enough to visit the present finance minister of Kerala to share my outlooks regarding this particular programme and know his response on them. It was again an enlightening and learning moment as I was given sufficient time by the minister for discussion. Presently, there are only 63 IT units and some of them are in an extreme state of deprivation which makes it difficult for me to believe that once they were the highly demanded and paid female entrepreneurs of Kerala. Now being a researcher who

has uncovered the issues faced by these women, I take it as my responsibility to propagate the observations obtained through this study. But it has to be mentioned that though, interpretive research provides a lot of scope for researcher's point of view but in this study, most of the interactions, gestures were observed objectively without getting emotionally involved in the situation of the respondents. Nothing was more fascinating than the fact that, through this research I could actually illuminate most of the respondents regarding their perception on empowerment. As a feedback, most of the women entrepreneurs stated that this study could help them gain awareness on themselves.

7.11. Conclusion

The study has questioned the already accepted notion of empowerment and redefined the concept of empowerment by analysing the perspectives of women entrepreneurs working in Government ICT programme for women. The present study has also brought into light the complexities involved in the initiation of the process of empowerment. The analysis was done using ANT and the concept of functional simplification and OPP aided in further understanding the situation. Through this research, it was possible to unveil the institutional dynamics involved in the structure of the system. Sustainment was introduced as a prime concept which redefined the very meaning of empowerment for these women. What becomes evident through the study is that the strategic approach followed to construct women empowerment by the Government through ICT programme did thrive in its activities but it should be mentioned that they need a better mechanism for maintaining the acquired capabilities of women. The translation anticipated by the Government did form an institutional framework reinforced by professional norms and inter-organisational networks but the programme lacks the structure of sustainability which needs ample support from the Government officials. On account of the events recorded and studied, one is forced to ask this question – If they were meant to collapse, then why were they empowered?

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Kudumbasree IT Unit Details

1. Location
2. Year of initiation
3. No. of members
4. Activities/services handled
5. ICT tools used
6. Number of members during the beginning stage?
7. How many members dropped out?
8. What are the reasons for dropping out?

Member Details

1. Age: 20-30 /31-40/ 41-50/ 50 and above
2. Religion: Hindu / Christian / Muslim
3. Caste: General / OBC / SC / ST
4. Number of family members:
5. Number of children: 1-2 /3-4 /5-6 /None
6. Educational qualification of respondent: Up to SSLC / PDC / +2 / Graduation and above
7. Professional qualification (related to computers/software) before and after training:
8. Educational qualification of husband: Up to SSLC / PDC / +2 / Graduation and above
9. Year of joining the IT unit:
10. Investment:
11. Working hours: 1-4/ 5-6/7-8/ 8 and above hours
12. Monthly income through IT Unit: Up to 5000/5001-10000/Above 10000

13. Motivation behind joining IT Unit:
14. Do you have any additional source of income: Yes / No
15. If yes, source of income: Self Employment / Agriculture / Business/
Govt. service, private Companies/service pension
16. Total monthly income of the family: Up to 5000/5001-10000/Above
17. Type of family: Joint family /Extended family/ Nuclear family
18. How did you come to know about Kudumbashree IT units?

Social empowerment (After joining IT Unit) [Strongly agree/ Agree/ No opinion/
Disagree/ Strongly disagree]

1. I know my potential
2. I am aware of my limitations
3. I am aware of my rights and responsibilities
4. I am resilient in dealing with difficult conditions
5. I have demonstrated perseverance in my work.
6. I have attained leadership qualities.
7. I have equal status in my family
8. Communication power has enhanced
9. I express my views effectively in any public forum
10. I speak for my group in any official meeting
11. I participate in discussions related to my children's education and marriage
12. My decisions are valued in my family
13. I am capable of handling new responsibility.
14. I have a positive attitude towards work.
15. I update my skills and knowledge based on new technological developments.
16. I know to operate a computer
17. I know to use a mobile phone
18. Can provide technical support to my children
19. I have the ability to organize/mobilize women's activity.
20. I have strong networks with my friends and family.

21. I participate in social networking.
22. I travel long distance for work.
23. I stay late night to complete the given task.
24. I have the liberty to visit my friends and relatives.
25. I treat my group as family.
26. My group approves my opinion.
27. I am determined to work in KITE.

Economic empowerment (Before and After joining IT Unit) [Strongly agree/ Agree/ No opinion/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree]

1. I was active in attaining the goals of my KITE.
2. I was involved in making my group reach financial stability.
3. I work only for my needs.
4. I will leave my group for a better job.
5. I have tried to enhance my educational qualification.
6. I have attended all the trainings provided by the KM.
7. I can work independently without any help from my group members.
8. My group looks for me in times of trouble.
9. I have canvassed works for my group.
10. I own productive assets.
11. Decisions on household minor purchase are discussed with me.
12. Decisions on household major purchase are discussed with me.
13. I have the liberty to decide the use of my income.
14. A certain portion of my income is contributed towards family regularly.
15. I can undertake and manage the economic affairs of my family.
16. I can undertake and manage the economic transactions of my group.
17. I know how to open a bank account.
18. I spend on my child's education.

Political empowerment (Before and after joining IT Unit) [Strongly agree/ Agree/
No opinion/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree]

1. I have the liberty to decide the use of my husband's income.
2. I question if any discrimination is happening against women.
3. I have the ability to form a group of women for a purpose.
4. My decisions are represented in my family.
5. My decisions are represented in community.
6. I am liable for my actions.
7. I can confront the authorities for my mistakes.
8. I confront my group mates for my mistakes.
9. I participate in the protest against women oppression
10. I regularly participate in Grama Sabha.
11. I am an active member of a political party.
12. My likelihood of voting has increased.
13. I plan to contest in local body election.

I. Prospects

1. What are the positive outcomes experienced by you from your family/ community/workplace during the initial years?
2. Are they still encouraging you to work for Kudumbashree IT unit?:
Yes/ No
3. If yes, in what way are they supporting you?
4. Has the percentage of your contribution in family income increased? :
Yes/ No
5. If yes, how has it affected your role as a wife/ mother and daughter?
Explain.
6. Have you attained more 'say' in the decision making process of your family and working environment? :Yes/ No
7. If yes, explain with examples.
8. Are you able to resolve your own problems without the support from your family members? : Yes/ No

9. If yes, explain with examples.
10. Are you able to spend your income without the consent of your family members? :Yes/ No
11. Are you able to make decisions to channelise the money in your family? :Yes / No
12. Has the participation in Kudumbasree IT units increased your confidence? : Yes/ No
13. If yes, then in what way? Explain with examples.
14. Do you identify the positive roles played by ICTs? :Yes/No
If yes, what are major positives?
15. Do you want your children to be IT literate? ;Yes/No

II. Challenges

16. Did you face any setback from your family/community/workplace during the initial years?
17. Are you aware of any distortions within the Kudumbashree units? :Yes/No
18. If yes, what kind of problems are they?
19. If yes, has it caused any problem for you? :Always/ Sometimes/ Never
20. To what extent the problem has affected you? : great/ some/ never
21. Are you able to discuss all the problems in the Kudumbashree meetings? : Yes/No
22. If no, what are the reasons for that?
23. Do you have any restrictions to move outside from your village for meetings and other activities? : Yes/No
24. If yes, what are the hurdles faced by you?
25. Do you think that Kudumbashree IT Units are not getting proper attention from the officials/ public/ government side? : Yes/ No
26. If yes, what are the reasons identified for this discrimination?
27. Do you get time to do the domestic work? : To a great extent/To some extent/Not at all

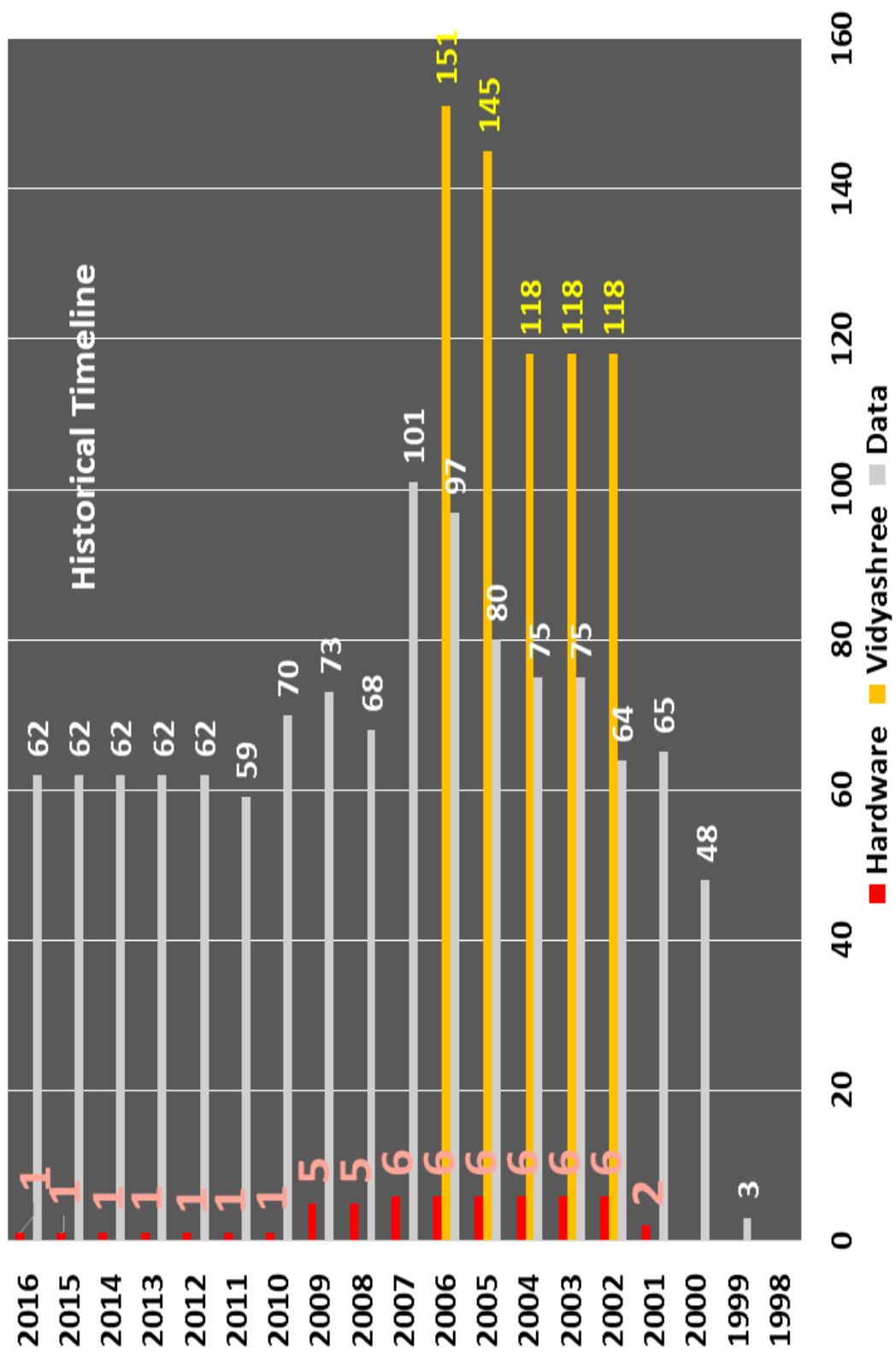
- 28.** Do you get time to look after your husband and children? : To a great extent/To some extent/Not at all
- 29.** What is the attitude of the following members? Whether they create any problems for you and if problematic, explain?
- 30.** Does the work/ working environment cause any stress for you? : Yes/ No
- 31.** If yes, then what are the reasons for the stress?
- 32.** How do you tackle with the stress?

Group interview checklist (Respondents)

1. Attitude towards work before joining IT unit?
2. Present attitude
3. Motivation for joining
4. Formation of KITE
5. Present situation of KITE
6. Financial benefit (if any)
7. Constraining factors
8. Liberating factors
9. Empowerment
10. Any suggestions

Group interview checklist (Key informants)

1. Formation of KITE
2. Mobilization of women beneficiaries
3. Beginning stage
4. Association with KITE
5. Formation of Unnathi Consortium
6. Reason
7. Complexities faced (if any)
8. Future of KITE
9. Regarding women beneficiaries
10. Any suggestions



Historical Timeline

Year	Data entry units	Vidyashree IT units	Hardware units	Total	Major events
1998	0	0	0	0	
1999	3	0	0	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial discussions held on August 15 and a data entry unit was formed on September 15 with 10 members. • Plan review meeting held to disclose the benefits of KITEs. • Resolution was passed stating that works worth ₹ 10 lakh will be canvassed by KM to the units formed before March 31, 2010. • Proper support and guidance provided from Kudumbashree Mission (KM)
2000	48	0	0	48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge availability of work. • Proper support and guidance from Kudumbashree Mission (KM) • Units formed all over Kerala. • EDPs began
2001	65	0	2	67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New government formed on 17th May by UDF. • Works were not affected by election • Software team formed to support data entry units • Hardware units formed to tackle system issues – as a step to make them self-reliant • Huge availability of work for all units.

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Units were structured and organized by KM • IT@School Project was established and IT campaigns were conducted state wide • KM managed to obtain the five year contract to implement IT education at schools through Kudumbashree women
2002	64	118	6	188	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vidyashree IT units started with five women in each unit and charging ₹ 50/-per student. • Number of hardware units increased • Regular payments ensured by KM • Availability of work • Network of Master trainers and School IT Co-ordinators were formed and Teacher empowerment programmes started • Akshaya project launched on November 18.
2003	75	118	6	199	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data entry units increased • Support from KM ensured • Huge profits made from data entry projects • Regular payment • IT became a Compulsory subject in State Curriculum, IT practical exams undertaken
2004	75	118	6	199	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Resource Centres of the Project were setup and IT enabled contents developed • IT training fees reduced to ₹ 25/- per student • Sustaining became difficult for Vidyashree IT units due to lack of remuneration. • Payments were regular

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Loans were repaid by the data entry units •Continuous monitoring and follow up by KM
2005	80	145	6	231	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Data entry units increased •Vidyashree IT units increased •IT@School Linux was developed so was the launch of EDUSAT VICTERS network •PTA became unsupportive of Vidyashree IT units. They wanted to appoint professionals. •Huge thrust for Kudumbashree in grass root level increasing its spread
2006	97	151	6	254	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Considered as the most efficient period for all the units •New government was formed on 18th May by LDF. •Delay in payments experienced. •Works were not obtained. •Complete shift to Free Software, Handbooks and supplements developed. •The term for Vidyashree IT units was over.
2007	101	0	6	107	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Vidyashree IT units closed and absorbed as data entry units, raising the number of data entry units. •Most of the Vidyashree units perished. •Work as not enough for all units. •Debt increased •Payment was lagging. •Women started leaving units due to family pressure, marriage, other employment etc.

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Akshaya moved into rendering new G2C and B2C services. • CSC e-governance services released for Kudumbashree data entry units • Information not disseminated properly
2008	68	0	5	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge decrease in the number of units. • Few works obtained mostly by units working in corporation. • Payment was lagging. • Lack of monitoring and follow up
2009	73	0	5	78	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KM tried to maintain the number of units by increasing its number • Service tax was pending to be paid. • Payment was lagging. • Proposal for Unnathi IT Consortium prepared to tackle the upgrade units with the support from GOK. • Lack of monitoring and follow up
2010	70	0	1	71	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data entry units started to decrease • Hardware units due to lack of monitoring. • Conflicts emerged amongst group members for payment. • Data entry units lost attention from KM • No works • No payments • Some units sustained by canvassing works themselves. • Lack of monitoring and follow up
2011	59	0	1	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New government formed on 18th May by UDF

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections hampered the data entry works further delaying the payments • Considered as the most inefficient period • Discussions held to revamp KITEs • Unnathi bylaw prepared by August 8. • Initial discussions held with members.
2012	62	0	1	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unnathi IT consortium formed on January 17. • KITEs separated from KM without providing any initial support • Got structured – executive members elected from all districts • Hired professionals for support • Obtained some works with the help of KM • Lack of monitoring and follow up
2013	62	0	1	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed payments • Lack of continues works • Units continued canvassing their own works through social networks • No rules followed • No information dissemination • Unorganized • No monitoring and follow up
2014	62	0	1	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained some works but payments were delayed • Units not satisfied with works and payment • No rules followed • No information dissemination • Unorganized • No monitoring and follow up
2015	62	0	1	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few works obtained

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Members reluctant to add new units •Delayed payments •Unorganized •No monitoring and follow up
2016	62	0	1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Motor Vehicles Department (MVD) e-Seva Kendras with the help of KITE. •e-seva not obtained by all districts •New government formed on 25th May by LDF. •data entry payments delayed •most of the units trying to alternatives for survival •Some are using Akshaya services also.

LIST OF PAPERS BASED ON THESIS

Papers in Refereed Journals/ Book Chapters

- [1] Rashmi, M., & Lekshmi, V. Nair. (2015). Empowering Entrepreneurship in Female run ICT Enterprise: A study in Kerala, *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 7(2), 1316 -1324.
- [2] Rashmi, M., & Lekshmi, V. Nair. (2014). ICT and Employment among women: A case study of Kudumbashree ICT Project. *European Scientific Journal*, 10(32), 224 - 237.
- [3] Rashmi, M., & Lekshmi, V. Nair. (2014). Rural Women for IT: An overview of Kudumbashree IT Project. In T. Sundara Raj (Eds.), *Transition in Rural Life* (60 - 78). New Delhi: Southern Book Star.

Communicated Papers

- [1] Rashmi M, & Lekshmi, V. Nair. (2016). Flying KITEs: The case of First Women IT Micro Enterprises of Kerala communicated in Economic and Political Weekly.
- [2] Rashmi M, & Lekshmi, V. Nair. (2016). Institutionalizing ICT: A Sociological study on Women's Micro Enterprise communicated in The Sociological Review.

Attended Conferences/ Workshops

- [1] Presented a paper entitled **Reconstruction of Empowerment: A study in Digital Kerala** in the International seminar on Living and Working in a Digital Age: International Insights held at Trivandrum, Kerala, June 25, 2016.
- [2] Participated in a two day Workshop on **Using ICT in Social Science Research** held at Trivandrum, 27-28, February, 2016.

- [3] Presented a paper entitled **Socio-economic study of Kudumbashree IT Enterprises in Kerala** in the International Conclave on Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship held at Loyola College of Social Sciences, Trivandrum, Kerala, December 7-9, 2015.
- [4] Presented a paper entitled **A Study on Government ICT Programmes for women in Kerala** in the National seminar on Sociology in India – Issues and Challenges held at SH College, Thevara, Ernakulam, Kerala, December 13-15, 2013 (*The paper won Best Paper Award – Dr. Jose Murickan S.J Memorial Award*).
- [5] Participated in the All India Young Social Scientists Workshop on **Technology and Society: Issues and Challenges** held at Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan, Gujarat, September 26 – 27, 2011.