

**Taking Solidarity Seriously:
Analyzing *Kudumbashree* as a Women's
Social and Solidarity Economy
Experiment**

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Significance of the case

- Structures of solidarity at all three levels (micro, meso and systemic – Corragio)
- Real goal is the creation of an alternative social, political and economic space led by women – transforming social relations
- Women are not only ‘participants’ but the articulators of alternative vision of justice
- An attempt to transcend the welfarist paradigm

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BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO KERALA

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Kerala

Indicators of Human Development	Kerala	All of India
Male literacy rate	94	76
Female literacy rate	88	54
Percentage of Population Below Poverty Line -	13	26*
Infant Mortality Rate	14	68
Human Development Index Rank 2001 (out of 15)	1	

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“People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning”

- Launch in Kerala (1996)
 - Launched by the communist party (after election victory)
- Devolves 35-40% of the budget to local govt.
 - Subject to them having local development plans based upon citizen participation
- Goals
 - Break up the system of endemic exclusions
 - Enable local participation

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Kerala: The Nature of Agency

One of the central pillars of the Kerala model has been the nature of agency:

- Collective agency e.g., local communities, people's organizations, networks of solidarity
- Decentralization, which has opened up space for agents at the local level
- 50% reservation for women in local bodies (2011)

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THE STORY OF KUDUMBASHREE

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Scale

- 3.7 million women
- Some 46,444 group enterprises (250,000 women) in agriculture, another 12,000 enterprises operate in other sectors, all owned and run by women
- 10 million acres of land under women-led agriculture

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What is Kudumbashree?

- An approach to poverty reduction that rests crucially on the leadership of the doubly – triply, marginalized –
- as women, as the poor, as dalits (low caste), as adivasis (indigenous communities), as religious minorities.

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Twofold Structure

- **Social Movement**
 - A state-wide women's organization which has grown into the largest women's movement in Asia, with 3.7 million members
- **Government Agency**
 - planning and facilitation body

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The Government Agency

- Kudumbashree is the Official Anti-poverty Program of the state of Kerala
- Unofficially, it seeks more than poverty eradication
 - an alternative development model

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A Statewide Women's Movement

- Has features of a Social Movement
 - Organized independently of the state
 - Bottom-up organization
- Three tiered structure
 - Neighbourhood Groups (200,000)
 - Area Development Societies (16,950)
 - Community Development Societies (1058)

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Features (1)

- Promoting ‘Collectives of Excellence’
 - Going beyond micro-enterprise
 - Innovative organizational models for sharing risk, assets, cost.
- Scaling Up in New Sectors
 - Moving into new industries (textiles, handicrafts)
 - Scaling up production (from handloom to industrial)

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Features (2)

- Distribution
 - Developed local production-marketing-consumption value chain. It operates by linking local Kudumbashree enterprises to the local consumers through a network of women direct-sellers and a professional management team.



Gains from Solidarity (1)

First, it has brought about greater social inclusion and integration.

It has not only allowed women to enter into the formal economy, but has done so in ways that have created greater dignity and self-worth.

It has not only helped to incorporate particularly marginalized groups in the economy, but also to integrate them into diverse collectives.

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Solidarity (2)

It has radically transformed the structure of work for poor women as they have moved from being **wage labourers to being independent producers**. In the process they have gained control over their time and labour, over what they want to produce and how, and over their produce.

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Solidarity (3)

There has been a significant change in the nature of agriculture in Kerala. The dramatic increase in the participation of poor women has not only increased food security but has gone a long way to promoting **food sovereignty** as control over production is being broadened and democratized.

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Challenges

- Ownership
- Meso and systemic levels
- Effective voice in public policy – so that they are not merely recipients of policy but creators
- Voice in the global SSE discourse – how do they not just become a case study but leaders?

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