

Women Farmers in Kerala, India and the Gendered Division of Labour: The Kudumbashree Experience

[Aswathy S](#) and [Shewli Kumar](#)

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the largest employment sectors in India. As per the 2011 census, of the 72.3 per cent of people engaged in agriculture, the total number of female workers is 149.8 million. Of all workers in India, 24.64 per cent are cultivators of which 24.92 per cent are male and 24.01 per cent female. Of all persons, 29.96 per cent are agricultural labourers, of which 18.56 per cent are male and 55.21 per cent are female.^[1] Out of a total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million women are cultivators and another 61.7 million are agricultural labourers. The gender disparity is quite apparent in this data wherein there are more women working as agricultural labourers than as cultivators. The data leaves out the work that women do as unpaid family work within the agricultural sector.^[2]

In Kerala agriculture has played a significant role in the economy and improving food security is an important agenda for state planning. Despite a declining growth in the agriculture and allied sectors from 13.7 per cent in 2012–13 to 10.5 per cent in 2016–17, women play a significant role in the field of agriculture in Kerala. Indeed, women have multiple roles including agricultural, domestic and allied activities. The work under agriculture includes sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigating, applying fertilizer, protecting plants, harvesting, winnowing and storing. Domestic activities include reproducing the next generation, cooking, looking after the family, collecting water, food and fuelwood and maintaining the household. This is a double burden in all households, but especially it affects female-headed families such as widows, separated and divorced women and also women whose husbands have migrated to other places in search of employment. Along with this, women are engaged in allied activities such as cattle management, fodder collection, milking, taking care of fisheries and poultry, and for these activities, women have to invest additional time.^[3] Thus, there is an unequal gendered allocation of work between household duties and agriculture. This paper argues that women farmers are seen by society as supplementary workers and the sexual division of labour impacts on their roles in agricultural work. Using a feminist theoretical framework this paper highlights the unequal gendered aspects of the Kudumbashree programme interventions with women farmers in two districts in Kerala: Wayanad and Alappuzha. We make recommendations in relation to what needs to be done to ensure recognition and affirmation of women's contributions in both the farming and caring work and the need for a gender transformative shift in the approach of the Kudumbashree programmes.

Women farmers and the sexual division of labour

The sexual division of labour refers to the allocation of different types of work allocated to women and men based on an understanding of masculinity and femininity. In feminist economics, the institutional rules, norms and practices that govern the allocation of tasks between women and men (and girls and boys) constitute the sexual division of labour, which is seen as variable over time and space and constantly

under negotiation.[4] In her research on the women lace makers of Narsapur in West Bengal, Maria Mies highlighted that it is a necessary precondition to define women as housewives and devalue the work that they do so as to exploit their labour in domestic industries and the informal sector. The notion of women as caregivers, nurturers and housewives has been perpetuated by social scientists and researchers as aiding and abetting the capitalist mode of production that exploits women's labour. This devaluation of women's labour has resulted in men as 'breadwinners' becoming the social norm and women's work doing the unpaid labour of 'housewives and caregivers.' [5] With the perpetuation of unequal gendered norms, it is inevitable that women are more likely to have an increasing burden of labour, more specifically in devalued unpaid labour, whereas men are likely to be in paid labour which has more value attached to it.

In many countries, the most obvious pattern in the sexual division of labour is that women are mostly confined to unpaid domestic work and unpaid food production, while men dominate in cash crop production and wage employment. In her ground-breaking work, Ester Boserup suggests that women are not just limited to domestic work in developing countries in Asia and Africa but that they play a vital role in agriculture and in multiple other livelihoods.[6] Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen explain how Boserup's work highlights the absence of data with regard to women's work in agriculture as their work was seen as subsistence work for the maintenance of the household and not really contributing to the economy.[7] According to Boserup this understanding and allocation of work was a result of the impact of European colonial interventions in Asian and African societies through land reforms where they effectively pushed women into subsistence labour in agriculture as they did not understand the female farming systems or have any inclination to do so.[8] As a result the role that women play in agriculture continues to be underestimated and underreported in national data and statistics, thereby devaluing their enormous contribution. It also relegates domestic household management work as part of women's responsibility and not really economic in nature, which is a further devaluation of the amount of work that women do to maintain households.

Bibhu Santosh Behera and Anna Charan Behera explored the role of women farmers in agriculture and allied activities in India and show that women play multiple roles in agriculture and allied activities like livestock rearing, poultry, fishing, dairy and forestry.[9] Apart from this work, women carry the extra burden of collecting water, providing fodder for the livestock, collecting firewood and preparing dung cakes, cleaning sheds and collecting farmyard manure. Kunjulekshmi Saradamoni, in her research conducted in three states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, has discussed women's roles in rice farming.[10] She explains the regional variations in roles that women and men play in rice farming and production. Growing rice is labour-intensive and requires agricultural workers to put in several hours of intensive work in the fields each day which includes land preparation, sowing, replanting, removal of weeds, watering and harvesting. According to Saradamoni's study, most of the agricultural labourers do not own the land, or they have only very small parcels of their own land which is not viable for rice cultivation. Most of the work of wet rice farming involves standing in the water for transplantation, weeding and applying cow dung as fertiliser, ploughing the field, fixing bunds, harvesting and processing the paddy.[11] Saradamoni's study did not find a uniform sexual division of labour in the farming activities, but what was similar in all three states was that most households were poor and belonged to largely lower caste social categories. Most of work done by the women was devalued and they were paid less in wages than the men. Nevertheless, in most cases the women's income played a significant role in bringing in much needed money for poor families. Saradamoni concludes that women are doing specialised work in the field and even though women's contribution to paddy cultivation is crucial, it is treated as supplementary, temporary and insignificant in many cases.[12] Men have access to different technological skills compared to women and the general notion is that men have better skill sets. Further, women are restricted from learning new skills and this results in women having to do the tiring, backbreaking, physical and time-consuming work of replanting, weeding, hand harvesting.[13] According to Ambra Gallina, women are often not encouraged to participate in extension activities (training in agricultural techniques and skills to improve their productivity, as well as collaboration and participation with non-governmental organisations) because farmers and

farming activities are perceived as male by the policy makers, planners and agricultural service providers.^[14]

About Kudumbashree: A Kerala Government initiative for women farmers

Kerala's development approach has been lauded as unique with an emphasis on decentralisation and institution building from village and urban municipality levels to district and state levels. This approach has paid dividends in including the hitherto socially excluded groups of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes, as well as women from all social groups into the political as well as institutional systems of governance.^[15] The focus on local governance has ensured greater participation of women in all tiers of the government's planning process and enhanced the inclusion of gender issues.^[16] Kudumbashree is an initiative of the Kerala Government aimed at poverty eradication with programme objectives for empowering women and ensuring that they become equal partners in poverty alleviation and development activities. Kudumbashree has initiatives designed to enhance the livelihoods of women in rural and urban areas and also to enhance convergence with other government programmes for housing, health and education. It has a presence in all the districts of Kerala and caters to 4.4 million women.

Kudumbashree in Kerala organises women at the grassroots level through Neighbourhood Group (NHGs) collectives. According to Rajeev Kumaramkandath and Bindu P. Verghese the farming initiatives of Kudumbashree started by organising women into Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) to begin farming in groups on leased lands,^[17] with the objectives of reverting fallow land to cultivable land, and thus creating livelihoods for poor and landless women and also ensuring the food security of the state. According to a report by Kudumbashree, through collective farming initiatives, the state has 45,776 JLGs with over 0.24 million women farmers and 445,153 ha or 4451.53 sq.km under cultivation.^[18] It is envisaged that such an intervention will enable institution building amongst women farmers and ensure poverty alleviation among the poorer sections of rural society in Kerala.

The work of Kudumbashree is one of a kind and a feminist analysis of its interventions in agriculture, more specifically in rice farming, is required to demonstrate its effectiveness. It is important to explore whether its implementation has brought about a change in gender inequality and the sexual division of labour. The concept of 'empowerment' gets confused by women's location within specific social groups such as caste, tribe and religion. As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains, the intersectionality of these identities impacts on the lives of specific women in different ways, as they are not a homogenous category.^[19] Therefore, the outcomes of development programmes require different strategies to address women's specific situations. That said, most development interventions approach women through a homogenous lens and hence they often miss out on the diverse knowledge systems and socio-cultural and economic contexts of these women.

It is within this framework that this paper explores whether the Kudumbashree programme has enabled women to overcome the gendered nature of work in the agriculture sector and transform the sexual division of labour. The paper, based on primary research, uses the narratives of the women belonging to different caste and tribal groups in two panchayats of Kerala, and explores the presence or otherwise of an unequal sexual division of labour despite Kudumbashree's interventions.

Theoretical framework of the research

This research has used the Social Relations framework by Naila Kabeer and locates how human well-being is comprised of survival, security and autonomy.^[20] Production of goods not just about market but also includes reproduction of labour, subsistence activities and looking after the environment. Kabeer argues that the lives of all humans are interconnected with unequal social relations, and this includes

gender relations and their intersectionalities based on caste, ethnicity, religion and other social stratifications, found in diverse societies. These social relations lead to the unequal distribution of resources and access to and control over them. Such inequalities are embedded with four institutions, that is: the household, the community, state institutions and the market. The continuance of the inequalities is based on five key components and human interactions:

1. Rules—both informal (norms) and formal, which govern roles and status in the societal system
2. Activities—who does what, who can claim what and gets access to what.
3. Resources—what is produced both tangible and intangible.
4. People—who is in, who is out and who does what.
5. Power—who decides and whose interests are served.

Methodology and the sites of research

This in-depth qualitative research using feminist phenomenology study focuses on the experiences and narratives of women farmers engaged in paddy cultivation in the Kudumbashree programme. The research was conducted in Kerala State and the districts selected for the study were Wayanad, and Alappuzha considering the agroecology, women's participation and the district initiatives on farming. The data was collected between April and May 2018 from selected women farmers and officials from panchayats, districts and state levels. In-depth interviews with women farmers and officials and focus group discussions were conducted in four panchayats. In each district, two panchayats were selected as the centre of the study. This means that a total of four panchayats from two districts were chosen for the study. A sample of twenty-four women was selected from the four panchayats and their association with Kudumbashree ranged from four to twenty-three years. Non-probability sampling, that is purposive sampling, was used for the collection of data from the respondents.^[21] The number of respondents depended on the saturation of the data from the respondents. Kudumbashree has introduced rice farming as a livelihood intervention for women in these two districts. Rice farming is labour intensive and women farmers from five major social groups are involved in this farming programme. Aswathy S conducted the study as part of her PhD programme. The interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes. Her institution (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India) provided the request letter authorising data collection and, through the Kudumbashree office, she contacted the women.

In Alappuzha, the region called Kuttanad is known as 'the rice bowl' of the state and has a long association with the technique and therefore a depth of traditional knowledge regarding systems of rice farming. Hence it was selected for the study. The second district, Wayanad, has a predominantly tribal population and a practice of collective farming. The Kurichya tribe in Wayanad has a rich traditional knowledge base related to farming. The major social groups in Alappuzha district are Ezhava who belong to Other Backward Class (OBC),^[22] Vela who are a Scheduled Caste (SC), Nair (General) and Pulaya (SC) and women from these groups are part of the collective farming initiative of Kudumbashree. In Wayanad the social groups are Kurichya who are a Scheduled Tribe (ST), Ezhava (OBC), Christian (General), Nambisan (General) and Chettis (OBC) and women from these communities are part of the paddy cultivation initiative of the Kudumbashree programme.



Map 1. Kerala, India

Source. Downloaded from [FREEWORLDMAPS.NET](http://www.freeworldmaps.net) on 21 May 2022.

Findings of the study

Despite the initiation of collective rice farming with women through the Kudumbashree programme it was found that several households and their family members continued with multiple livelihood activities as well to ensure a better earning capacity. In the Kanjikuzhy Panchayat of Alappuzha district, people were engaged in coir work and agriculture. The Ezhava community, in particular, were involved in various stages of the production of coir, as had been another coastal belt communities of Kerala. After some point,

people in this region stopped coir work and shifted to livelihood activities as they gained exposure to other means of support. Now, people are involved in agriculture, the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS),^[23] which is a government programme that provides daily wage labour and salaried jobs (that are available to educated people). Nevertheless, some of the women of the Ezhava community have returned to coir work. These women belong to the OBC, SC, ST and general caste categories. The responses from these women indicated that there is a multiplicity of livelihood practices among most of the people in the Alappuzha district and most of the women also depend on Kudumbashree activities along with other income-generating activities. This reflects that the different livelihood initiatives of Kudumbashree alone cannot meet all the financial requirements of the women. One of the woman respondents, from Ezhava caste Kanjikuzhy panchayat, said, 'Earlier it was coir work. Here it was always the sound of the coir spinning machine. But after the introduction of MGNREGS, people stopped doing coir work. But now some people again started doing coir work. They are doing it at their homes.'

Similarly, another woman from the Chetti caste from the same panchayat and one woman, from Ezhava, Thirunelly panchayat reflected on how people are depending less on farming and more on cattle rearing and daily wage work for subsistence. As they explained, 'People are doing less farming now. They depend more on cattle rearing and daily wage work.'

In contrast, in Wayanad, a predominantly tribal district, agriculture has remained a major source of livelihood. Historically the Kurichiyas practised subsistence agriculture and have an intimate knowledge of the different varieties of rice that they grow in the region. Again, most of the women in both districts belong to OBC, SC, ST and general caste categories and they explained that it is not possible to depend solely on rice farming and agricultural work to meet the needs of their households and they augment their income with other forms of labour. This means that women have extra work burdens as they toil unceasingly in the household on the farm and at their other livelihood activities.

The unending rhythm of work: From household to the field and back

To understand the women's daily routines, the research participants were asked questions regarding the number of hours spent in household tasks, farming and other work. It is noteworthy that women told us that they spend a large part of their time on household chores, and the remaining time they spend on livelihood activities. The average time they spend on household chores (kitchen activities, cleaning work and washing clothes) is seven hours per day. The average time spent on farming activities is also seven hours per day. The women who have cattle, spend an average of one hour daily on cattle rearing activities. Women who have children attending school spend an average of one hour per day helping with homework. Very few women have time for rest, recreation and self-care. Out of the twenty-four respondents, five were involved in other livelihood activities such as MGNREGS or coir work. The women explained that their work chores overlap, and they have to multitask to save time. As one of the Ezhava women remarked,

Yes, it is a wonder for everyone that how I manage this much work. I have cows. I wake up at 4 a.m. and milk cows and sell the milk. Then I have a cup of tea. Then I cook rice followed by washing kitchen utensils. After that I go out after handing over the kitchen work to my daughter. I go to pluck vegetables from farm at around 6.30 a.m. After collecting the vegetables, I proceed to MGNREGS work. Now we are preparing a plant nursery so, we water the saplings and return by 8.45 a.m. After that work gets over, I carry my breakfast for work. If it is other than nursery work, then I return only at 1 p.m. At 1 p.m., I go home for lunch and return to work at 2 p.m. At 5 p.m., I go home. All work is going with an adjustment. MGNREGS work is allotted by panchayat. After 5 p.m., I come to [the] JLG farming field and water the crops with my team members. Everyone participates. After 6 p.m. I come back and take care of cows and will do all the remaining kitchen work. I don't watch TV. I spend [the] rest of my time at night ... writing accounts of NHG, MGNREGS, JLG till 10.30 p.m. Even after that, I am not able to complete the task of maintaining accounts. In between I need to look after the grandson and other work at home. I have my dinner before or after 10.30. At 11 p.m. I go to sleep. I do not have any rest. I am working full time.^[24]

Similarly, another (Chetti caste) participant explained,

I wake up at 4.30 a.m. My children go to school at 8.30 a.m. I prepare food and have breakfast and leave for work at 8.30 a.m. If I carry lunch, then I work till 4.30 p.m. or else I work till 3.30 p.m. After coming back, I do the remaining work at home and we have dinner. I go to sleep at around 11.30. Sometimes I watch television in between.

The responses across caste and tribe were similar with the women describing that the household responsibilities were their domain and only a few narrated that their husbands shared the work as and when they felt like it. There is no specific rest time or leisure time for women as they do multiple tasks at the same time. After returning from farming activities, they make dinner for the night and finish the left-over household work. The men have both the luxury of leisure time and the status that is associated with the fact that the work they do is considered to be the main livelihood activity. On the one hand, men's work is normally conducted away from the domestic residence which marks a clear delineation between their 'hard' work and home activities. On the other, women's farming work is for their homes, and they are forced to manage the double workload. This gendered role allocation also allows men to engage in more lucrative non-agricultural work.

The perceptions of the Kudumbashree officials echo the socio-cultural narrative of housework being primarily the responsibility of women. In fact, one Community Development Society (CDS) chairperson said that even if the women farmers were overburdened, they are happy doing all the work and that the women felt that the work they did was for their family. His opinion reinforces the unequal roles, responsibilities and cultural constructs that are based on gender, and which make women's work invisible and devalued.

Another CDS chairperson said that the women were not overburdened, and they did not have that much hard work at home. Her narrative is particularly illuminating reinforcing the social norms of gender roles,

If we could find out time for that then it is not a burden. We do not have that much hard work at home. The women do that work before they go to the field. And as far as agriculture work is concerned, it is more flexible. They can decide when to work. If it is too hot, then have a choice to take rest. So, there is no such big issue.

Some of the CDS Chairpersons indicated an acknowledgement of the burden of work of the women but they also reiterated that women were happy to do all the work for the wellbeing of their families.

Farmers are 'men' we only 'help'

Most of the participants, especially the Kurichya (ST) women, shared their in-depth knowledge of seeds and traditional farming techniques. Despite this knowledge they still considered themselves to be helping hands and their husbands to be the 'farmers'. One participant shared in detail about women's knowledge and roles in rice farming,

We know everything about it. First of all, we plough the land and prepare one field only for sowing. We apply cow dung and dried leaves and plough the remaining land. Then we construct the field bars and plough again and sow the seeds. Some seeds mature in 25–30 days. After 10 days crops start to grow and then we add the manure. Then after 25 days, we start to replant the rice seedlings. During these 30 days, we prepare the remaining field and replant the rice seedlings.

Despite the knowledge, skills and investment in agricultural processes, women continue to feel that men know more about farming than they do and that if something goes wrong the men can sense it and the women learn from the men. They feel the need for approval and assurance from their spouses in relation to farming. As shared by one woman,

Yes, there are differences. Farmers mean men. Men know more about farming than women. If something may go wrong in farming, they can sense it. I learned from them. In the agriculture field, only a few women are doing bold work and managing

all work alone. But usually, it is done by men. Women cannot do it alone.

Some of the women also expressed the fact that they could not handle some of the tasks and needed the help of their husbands for some activities such as spraying pesticides, sowing seedlings and running the boat. Another woman felt that the belief that only men should do the sowing forced some women who wanted to sow seedlings to hide it and only do this activity when the landlord was not around. As one of the women said, 'There are women who do that [sow seedlings] privately. But they will not reveal it publicly. There are women who do it in the middle of the field in the backwater region.'

Officials repeated the normative understandings of gender roles. As one of them pointed out there were differences in the work that men and women can actually do. She/he said, 'There is lots of work that demands hard work and so men are doing it. There are differences in the work. The women cannot do [work] like men. We are trying ... but that much perfection is not there.'

We don't own the land that we till

The collective farming approach puts the onus of the decision making about which lands to use for rice farming on the women themselves. There are a variety of ways in which such decisions are taken. The JLGs most often are made up of heterogeneous women from different social groups. They would make a decision as a collective about whose lands would be selected and, if needed, what part of the land would be leased from the nearby landowners. Their decision was based on how much land was required for rice farming.

Most of the women organised by Kudumbashree for collective farming do not own any land, except for a few women from OBC and general categories who, traditionally, have always had better control and ownership of land. The women who do not own or have family land have to arrange to lease land from landowners. As part of collective farming programme, there was no formal procedure by which leased land was made available, so the women had to negotiate with those who owned land. They also had to pay the lease amount from their own savings and earnings as Kudumbashree did not pay this initial amount to them. In panchayats, like Kanjikuzhy, Panamaram and Thirunelly, sometimes the women paid a portion of their harvest to the landowner, instead of paying rent for the land. Due to their economic backwardness and incapacity to pay the amount being requested, some SC and ST women, who were more impoverished than the women from OBC and general category social groups, often found it challenging to arrange the lease amount. These women did the rice farming collectively and they managed their produce either by selling it or consuming all of it at the household level. Some of their husbands owned land and controlled the use of this land. The women had to negotiate with them to use this land for collective farming. Some of the women gave some interesting insights into why men felt the need to maintain ownership and control over the land. One woman explained that the insecurity of men is associated with land ownership. Men either own the land in their name or else the land will be in joint ownership. Another woman explained that land was not in women's names maybe because of men's selfishness. She said,

Land is not in our names may be because of their selfishness that is what I feel like. Even after our marriage, he bought land but he did not feel to buy land in both of our names. (She smiled and said sarcastically) I do not know why he did not feel so. He may feel that I will take this land and go.

Another explanation given by a participant was,

Earlier also the land was in the name of the head of the family. So, the land is in the name of men. Now our ration card is in women's name. It is because men are addicted to alcohol and the family is run by women. Some men are taking responsibility for the family and some persons do not take care of their family.

There were other women who explained that even if they owned land, it would still be controlled and

managed by their husbands. As one of the women told us, 'I think men have more land in their names. What to say, (pauses) even if the land is in the name of women, their husbands would be controlling it. They both may manage, and I have never witnessed husbands and wives fighting for land ownership.'

Women do wish to own land but are overlooked by their own natal families, who mostly transfer the land they may have to their sons. Research has shown that intra-household bargaining improves for women if there is gender equal allocation of assets within the households and this boosts the power of decision making that women have outside the households.[25] In the Kudumbashree programme the women who are doing the collective farming have to source and lease land as a collective from the men who own it and this lack of control over land gives the women a sense of insecurity. The landlords may or may not approve a lease to the collective and charge prevailing market rates. The women who already belong to marginalised communities and come from poor backgrounds lack the bargaining power and often struggle to negotiate even a collective lease for rice farming.

Conclusion

Significant information about the ways in which Kudumbashree's interventions enhanced livelihoods and alleviated poverty among women and more specifically in the marginalised groups (SC, ST and OBC) through collective rice farming were brought out in this study. The interventions have also enhanced confidence among the women farmers and made them aware of the gender inequality within their households, which they have begun negotiating.

What it is further required, however, is to reduce the sexual division of labour both in households and within agriculture as well. The social and patriarchal norms prevent women from achieving their full contribution in farming. Further, the Kudumbashree programme has not focused on changing the gendered understanding of work, and the 'rules' of social relations continue to inform the perceptions of the officials and the men and women in the communities.[26] The women feel that they are engaged in less skilled activities in farming compared to men. This narrative of devaluing the work that women do both at the household level and in farming is echoed by Kudumbashree officials.

Even though Kudumbashree's collective programme helps the women, to an extent, with collective bargaining and addressing resource constraints, it needs to upscale the interventions and transform gender relations at the institutional level, in households, panchayats and the state. This transformation requires that women's unpaid work in household, in cattle rearing and farming be recognised as primary and valued work. Simultaneously women need to be empowered to articulate their contribution to farming—a contribution that is equal or even, perhaps, even more than that provided by men, since they are constantly multi-tasking work from home to the farm.

Kudumbashree's has a gender platform which is in a nascent stage and is a separate component that focuses more on violence against women, skill building and livelihoods for women. But it is imperative that gender interventions should not be separate programmes, but rather gender and intersectional analysis of the socio-economic contexts of the women and their situation needs to be incorporated into all Kudumbashree's programmes. While women are the main stakeholders in the Kudumbashree programmes, gender transformative approaches are essential and 'power' within households, communities, market and state institutions are changed. This would be possible with appropriate interactions, training, and dialogue with men, so that they are informed and the need to interrogate and transform gendered relations within households and communities is stressed. As highlighted, several of the Kudumbashree employees reinforced the gendered notion of women as good 'caregivers and hard workers' and failed to recognise the drudgery and burden of household work. This results in a huge work burden on women and this workload needs to be shared and thereby reduced by the cooperation and participation of all male members in household and communities. This radical transformation is a must as

women's contribution to the economy comes from a great deal of unpaid and devalued work which any programme aimed at 'empowering' women needs to consider when planning its interventions.

Another major aspect of the socio-cultural contexts of Kerala's landscape that needs highlighting is the dynamics of the intersection of caste, tribe and religion which play out in the lives of the women in this research study. Women belonging to these communities lack ownership and control over the land they farm, and leasing the land requires them to constantly negotiate with landlords who have power and control because the majority of them belong to socio-culturally dominant groups. There is a power dynamic which needs analysis relating to what it takes for women to access land for rice farming activities. A certain section of women, such as those in the Kurichiyas (Scheduled Tribe), are a potential source of traditional knowledge. The traditional farming knowledge of women needs recognition, documentation and the women need to be adequately remunerated for their labour. As a women's collective of Kudumbashree they have the potential to start questioning the existing gender roles and transforming the family and society as part of their empowerment process.

Notes

[1] [Labour Bureau](#), *Ministry of Labour and Employment*, (16 March 2015), accessed 21 Dec. 2016.

[2] [Anuradha Talwar](#), 'Hard work, low pay: Work patterns among rural women in West Bengal,' CSE Working Paper 2018–14, Azim Premji University (2018), accessed 14 Jul. 2019.

[3] Caroline Moser, *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice & Training*, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2003, [10.4324/9780203411940](#).

[4] [Maria Mies](#), 'Dynamics of sexual division of labour and capitalist accumulation: The women lace workers of Narsapur,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 16(10–12) (March 1981): 487–500, accessed 29 Apr. 2021.

[5] Mies, 'Dynamics of sexual division of labour,' p. 487.

[6] Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.

[7] [Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen](#), 'Accumulation, reproduction, and women's role in economic development: Boserup revisited,' *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7(2) (1981): 279–98, accessed 4 May 2010.

[8] Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development*.

[9] [Bibhu Santosh Behera and Anna Charan Behera](#), 'Gender issues: The role of women in agriculture sector in India,' *International Journal of Marketing, Financial Services & Management Research* 2(9) (September 2013): 134–45, accessed 19 May 2022.

[10] Kunjulekshmi Saradamoni, *Filling the Rice Bowl: Women in Paddy Cultivation*, Hyderabad: Sangam Book (India) Pvt. Limited, 1991.

[11] Saradamoni, *Filling the Rice Bowl*.

[12] Saradamoni, *Filling the Rice Bowl*.

[13] Saradamoni, *Filling the Rice Bowl*.

[14] [Ambra Gallina](#), 'Gender aware approaches in agricultural programmes – International literature review,' Sida, Secretariat for Evaluation, 2010, p. 25, accessed 23 Sep. 2020.

[15] Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India define who should be Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. See Government of India Ministry of Law and Justice Legislative Department, *The Constitution of India, 2020*, online: <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI.pdf>, accessed 19 May 2022.

- [16] Government of Kerala, *Economic Review 2019. State Planning Board*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: GOK Publication, 2019, accessed 19 May 2022.
- [17] Rajeev Kumaramkandath and Bindu P. Verghese, 'Sustainable livelihood and sustainable development: The experience of collective farming by Kudumbashree in Keralam, India,' *Indonesian Journal of International Law* 14 (October 2016): 94–115, doi: [10.17304/ijil.vol14.1.679](https://doi.org/10.17304/ijil.vol14.1.679).
- [18] [Kudumbashree](#): 'Farm Initiatives,' accessed 20 Apr. 2017.
- [19] Intersectionality is an analytical framework first proposed by legal feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw highlighting that women, who belong to groups such as African American, face multiple forms of discrimination which impact on their access to basic services and resources. Social discriminatory attitudes like racism and casteism seamlessly flow into all forms of institutional interactions and services to deny them their human rights. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color,' *Stanford Law Review* 43(6) (1991): 1241–99, doi: [10.2307/1229039](https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039).
- [20] [Candida March, Ines Smyth and Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay](#), *A Guide to Gender Analysis Frameworks*, Oxford: Oxfam 1999, p. 103, accessed 10 Jun. 2022.
- [21] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 204.
- [22] 'Other Backward Class' includes those persons belonging to socially and economically backward communities and notified in a prescribed list at national and state levels. See [Government of Kerala](#), 'Criteria for Identifying Backward Classes,' *The Kerala State Commission for Backward Classes*, accessed 6 Jun. 2022.
- [23] MGNREGS – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a government employment programme which provides 100 days' work in the villages on demand from the people. Anyone can ask for work if they have been issued a job card, including women.
- [24] NHG-Neighbourhood Groups were formed by Kudumbashree. Joint Liability Group (JLG) is a collective of women initiated by Kudumbashree
- [25] Bina Agarwal, *Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge South Asian Studies), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, doi: [10.1017/CBO9780511522000](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511522000); [Amartya Sen](#), *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny*, Social Development Papers No. 1, Office of Environment and Social Development Asian Development Bank, June 2000, accessed 19 May 2022.
- [26] Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, London: Verso, 1994.

MAIN

Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

URL: http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue47/aswathy_s.html

© Copyright

Page constructed by [Carolyn Brewer](#)

Last modified: 26 Jul. 2022 1130