# KERALA CALLING

**VS THE MAN OF MASSES**

**M.K. SANU**
**CULTURAL ICON OF KERALA**

# KERALA'S NATIONAL MODELS

**KUDUMBASHREE, SPC**
**LOKA KERALA SABHA**
**RESPONSIBLE TOURISM**

**COMPLETE DIGITAL LITERACY**

# സ്മാർട്ടായി
## കെ.എസ്.ആർ.ടി.സി.

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# KERALA'S NATIONAL MODELS

Kerala has recently cemented its position as a national leader in several key areas. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's announcement that the state is the first in the country to achieve complete digital literacy is a major milestone. This achievement is complemented by the state's remarkable performance in the *Swachh Survekshan* 2024 survey, where eight urban local bodies from Kerala were ranked among the top 100 cleanest cities in India. This is a significant leap from the previous year, when none of Kerala's cities were in the top 1,000. Furthermore, the Ministry of External Affairs has initiated steps to present the Loka Kerala Sabha model to other states, a testament to its effectiveness.

Kerala's legacy of social development is long-standing. It includes pioneering literacy movements and empowering women through Kudumbashree, one of the country's oldest and most successful self-help group programs. What makes these social changes so remarkable is their continuous evolution. Kudumbashree, for instance, has successfully transformed itself into a network of women entrepreneurs while maintaining its original mission as a self-help group. Similarly, the Kerala State Literacy Mission has expanded its scope to include equivalency programs for SSLC and Plus Two levels, all while continuing its foundational mission of ensuring basic literacy. The state also pioneered gender budgeting at the three-tier level following the introduction of People's Planning and Democratic Decentralisation.

We are proud that many of Kerala's innovative projects have been adopted by the Government of India as national initiatives. The state formulated India's first Responsible Tourism (RT) policy and established the Responsible Tourism Mission in 2017 after first introducing the concept in 2007. The Student Police Cadet program, a Kerala initiative, was rolled out nationwide in 2018. Additionally, Kerala formulated India's first transgender policy in 2015. The state also leads the country in palliative care and geriatric welfare. Another revolutionary initiative is the BUDS school program, a community-led effort to improve the lives of differently-abled children and their families. This edition is providing insight into these and other groundbreaking Kerala models that have gained national recognition.

The state recently mourned the passing of two of its veteran figures. V.S. Achuthanandan, a political maestro and legendary reformer who served as Kerala's former Chief Minister, passed away, leaving an indelible mark on the state's political landscape. We also lost Prof. M.K. Sanu, a distinguished writer and teacher who was a cultural icon of Kerala. Kerala Calling pays homage to these maestros.

**T.V. SUBHASH IAS**
EDITOR

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Excerpts from the speech made by
Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan during the declaration
of Kerala as the State with complete digital literacy

# A LANDMARK IN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT



(From Left): Minister for Forest and Wildlife, A.K. Sashindran, Minister for Food and Civil Supplies K. Rajan, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Minister for LSGD MB rajesh, Minister for education V. Shivankutty and Thiruvananthapuram Mayor Arya Rajeendran watch the elderly students of DIGI Keralam handle Digital Devices during the declaration ceremony.

## PINARAYI VIJAYAN

Kerala has once again set a historic benchmark by becoming the first state in the country to attain complete digital literacy. This milestone stands as a continuation of our legacy, recalling the landmark moment of April 1991 when Kerala was declared the first fully literate state. Today, we have advanced further—demonstrating that progress is sustainable only when built on inclusivity, vision and collective effort.

This achievement is the result of a meticulously designed and rigorously implemented strategy, inspired by the exemplary model of Pullampara Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district—the first in Kerala to achieve complete digital literacy. Overcoming significant challenges, Pullampara's success was driven by the determination of its local representatives and the tireless contributions of volunteers who reached every household to empower senior citizens, homemakers and ordinary citizens with essential digital skills.

## A Silent Revolution

The transformation is profound. People who were once unfamiliar with computers or smart phones now confidently manage online transactions, access e-governance services and engage actively on digital platforms reaffirming our position as a frontrunner in social advancement.

Digital literacy—the capability to utilise digital devices and the internet for everyday tasks—remains a privilege for much of the world. Nationally, only 38 percent of households possess such skills. Within this context, Kerala's universal achievement underscores the strength of our social infrastructure and the effectiveness of our governance model—one that places people at the centre of progress.

## A Concerted Effort

This accomplishment is underpinned by extensive groundwork: a comprehensive survey of over 83 lakh households identified 21,88,398 learners, of whom 21,87,667 successfully completed certification, including 15,223 individuals above 90 years of age and 1,35,668 between 76 and 90. The endeavour was sustained by the commitment of 2,57,048 volunteers, including students, NSS, NCC and NYK members; armed forces volunteers, Kudumbashree workers, literacy mission promoters, SC-ST promoters, employment guarantee scheme leaders, voluntary organisations such as the Library Council and technical personnel of the Local Self-Government Department. Their collective dedication deserves the highest recognition.

Particular tribute must be paid to Kerala's youth. Often criticised for over-engagement with digital devices, they instead demonstrated exceptional social responsibility—leading this transformation with zeal and empathy. They identified those left behind by technology within their own communities and guided them forward expecting nothing in return. Their contribution exemplifies the civic consciousness and progressive spirit of our younger generation.

## None Left Behind

This government's development philosophy is clear and unwavering: no one shall be excluded from the benefits of progress. This ethos has been fully realised in this initiative, which has reached even the remotest tribal settlements such as Idamalakudy, Attappady and Parambikulam.

Yet, this success marks not an end but a beginning. We now embark on the second phase of this mission, which will see the digitisation of essential personal records and their integration into DigiLocker—positioning Kerala to become the first state in India to adopt such a system universally. Furthermore, those who have achieved digital literacy will receive advanced training in cyber security awareness and the responsible use of digital platforms, ensuring that this empowerment is sustainable, ethical and future-ready.

For digital literacy to truly transform lives, it must be complemented by robust digital infrastructure. For this, Kerala has not only declared the internet as a right, but is also taking steps to make it available to everyone.

The KFON project should be understood from this perspective. About one and a half lakh internet connections have already been provided through it. In addition, public Wi-Fi hotspots have also been established. In this way, we are setting a model for the entire country by providing internet facilities, regardless of rural or urban areas.

> We now embark on the second phase, which will see the digitisation of essential personal records and their integration into DigiLocker.

The government has also taken steps to make all services smart. Currently, about nine hundred services are made available to the people online. In addition, the services of the Local Self-Government Department are also available through K-Smart.

Today, no one has to go to government offices for services. Today, most of the services like income certificate, caste certificate, ration card services, birth and death certificates, filing police complaints, etc. are being done online. That is the change that has come about in Kerala.

Steps have also been taken to provide certain government services to non-resident Malayalis without having to come to their homeland. The state government is effectively intervening in all areas of the digital network that has emerged in such a modern society.

Kerala's journey from universal literacy to universal digital literacy is more than a milestone; It demonstrates what is possible when vision aligns with public will, when inclusivity is prioritised and when governance is guided by a commitment to empowering every individual.

Prof. M.K Sanu is an independent intellectual whose literary contribution and intervention in the society is remembered for ever. Renowned poet Prabha Verma recalls his life and works spanning a century.

# MAN OF IMPOSSIBLES

**PRABHA VARMA**

A single adjective is not enough to describe Prof. M.K. Sanu. He is in the forefront in the list of people who carry the traits of many legacies in their personality. Well known in the society as a writer, critic, editor, teacher, biographer, orator, social worker, legislator and the president of Kerala Sahitya Akademi; the cultural maestro's epithets cannot be completed in a one liner. He was in the unparalleled heights in all the fields he had worked. Throughout his life, spanned almost a century, devoted almost every stage of services, he made every impossibles possible through hard work and dedication.

Sanu Mash, people fondly called him so, established his literary personality as of an independent intellectual committed to progressive writing. He followed the path of great poet Kumaranasan who philosophised that the duty of art is to be a blessed by the world. He was an advocate of progressive literary movement though initially he was not supportive. This change reflected in his literary works too.

He had in-depth knowledge in Western dramas and drama theories. His book on drama, *Natakavicharam* is a work that familiarised us with Western and Eastern drama techniques and theories. New ideas were meticulously interwoven in his writing. As the title *Wind and Light* (Kattum Velichavum) of his first work on the art of criticism shows he blew the *wind* and flashed the *light* of modern criticism to the minds of people.

We experience a romantic wave in the field of biography with him; he stands out with the most authentic and at the same time emotional biography of Sree Narayana Guru, the great poet Kumaranasan, Sahodaran Ayyappan, and renowned poet Changampuzha Krishna Pillai. If those were not written by him, many life details about them would have remained hidden. This is Sanu magic of turning hidden histories into a spark of unforgettable. His biographical works can be described as the mother of biographies in its treatment, narration and techniques.

> Sanu Mash's views on life, his political, literary and cultural stances, which proclaimed the greatness of humanity had great influence of Sree Narayana philosophy of which more researches are required.

In the field of criticism, refutation was not his method. He evaluated literary works only in the social and aesthetic context. While acknowledging the independent personality of the writer, he emphasised his relationship with society. Neither imposing his scholarship upon or belittling the work or person he adopted a unique method of review while entering into the depth of experiences and experiments of the work. This approach of new reading reflected in his lectures too. His art of criticism was pure and beautiful like a stream, or a gentle breeze. The reader would astonish and say, 'Oh, was there a level like this too?'

Sanu Mash was the first among the critics who established that the character *Vasavadatta* in poetry *Karuna* written by Kumaranasan was not described as just a body of a prostitute but sublimate her mind and soul. Sanu Mash also maintained an experiential method of criticism that elevates even an ordinary reader to the higher level of a critic imparting an aesthetic experience of the work in him. This can be seen in many works like *Prabhat Darshan, Rajaveethi,* and *Avadharanam.*

Sanu Mash's speeches reach deep into the hearts of the listeners. I recall a literary conference held in Karthikapalli about seven decades ago under the chairmanship of renowned critic and educationalist Joseph Mundassery where Sanu Mash made a powerful speech disagreeing with Mundassery. His speeches later became a claim of Kerala, especially for the progressive literary movements. His lectures were analysis of life through literature that travelled until horizons. For a student, he was the captain of the ship who navigated it through the turfs and tempest and anchored safely. He created a Sanumagic of mesmerism in teaching.

Many of my poetry have been blessed with his literary review. He wrote a prominent essay based on my *Shyama Madhavam* (Lament of the Dusky Lord). He wrote this, he told me once, out of pain he experienced when some people eagerly attempted to tear that work apart using non-poetic criteria. He wrote preface to my poetry *Ponnin Kolus* (Golden Anklet). He made original and meticulous observations about Shyama Madhavam in his speech delivered at the Vayalar Award ceremony where I was presented with the award. I remember this with gratitude.

Sanu Mash's views on life- his political, literary and cultural stances, which proclaimed the greatness of humanity, had great influence of Sree Narayana philosophy of which more researches are required. He showed us that a good class can be beneficial than reading hundred books. He did a remarkable job as a member of the legislature and proposed a bill in the assembly for differently-abled children. As an editor, he gave great representation to the new generation of writers in the Kumkum weekly. As the president of the Sahitya Akademi, he turned the academy into a platform for the presentation of various literary thoughts.

There is a notion that the literary people experience a creative explosion internally that uplift one's mind to the next level of growth. How many explosions of creativity might have experienced his mind! In every field he worked, Sanu Mash created a wave of passion and emotion that was never seen before. The state is impoverished due to the vacuum created by such a great personality leaves us.

*The author is a renowned poet and writer; recipient of many acclodes - Saraswati Samman, Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Award Vayalar Award etc.*

One of the key goals of the Sustainable Development agenda adopted by governments around the world, including India is to achieve gender equality by 2030. Gender Responsive Budgeting is powerful tool to achieve this goal.

# GENDER BUDGETING
# A CASE STUDY OF KERALA

**LEKHA CHAKRABORTY**

Gender budgeting has gained momentum globally with various countries started applying a gender lens to their existing budgets with an aim to promote gender equality and accountability in public financial management. Thus, Governments, while understanding gaps, and postulating ex-ante gender budgeting experiment a significant public financial management reform that ensures fiscal transparency and accountability while translating gender commitments into budgetary commitments.

India has been at the forefront of promoting gender budgeting in Asia Pacific. Thanks to the works of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), a policy think tank under the Ministry of Finance to become instrumental in pioneering gender budgeting. The NIPFP by providing analytical templates to the Ministry to integrate gender budgeting within the existing classification of budget and shaping the gender budgeting process both at the national and sub national levels made a significant impact on the global fiscal policies. The process transcends four stages: knowledge building, creating institutional structures, capacity building, and installing accountability mechanisms.

## Gender Budgeting in Kerala

Kerala has become the pioneer state in attempting gender sensitive planning and budgeting at the third tier since the introduction of People's Planning and Democratic Decentralisation. However, the State reflects a paradox in terms of gender development. In fact, the high literacy rates and the dramatic decline in fertility did not translate into rapid growth in paid employment for women or upward occupational mobility in the State. The electoral arena of Kerala has also fallen short on women's representation. There are two avenues through which democratic decentralisation can contribute to the empowerment of women: agency of women elected representatives; and new democratic space for local level intervention by women.

Despite low levels of economic growth, Kerala has demonstrated a good model for appropriate public policies and redistribution strategies which can meet the basic needs of the people. However, Kerala has failed to translate high social sector achievements into comparable achievements in the material production sectors. This has resulted in economic stagnation, growing unemployment, and an acute fiscal crisis thereby raising questions about the sustainability of the 'Kerala Model

of Development'. It is in this context the new model of growth with equity intended to accelerate economic growth which was a political response to the stagnating economy of the state in the form of 'People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning' has become a solution.

The feminisation of governance through the adoption of the 33 per cent gender quota created a new democratic space for local level interventions by elected women representatives. Kerala experienced the remarkable achievements in gender indicators in health and education on the one hand and extreme marginalisation of women especially in governance and work force participation on the other. The achievements in health and education have had no impact on the gender status as Dr. Thomas Isaac refers to in his paper 'Democratic Decentralisation and Women Empowerment: Kerala Model,' presented at the International Expert Group Meeting on Local Level Gender Responsive Budgeting at NIPFP in 2004. It was in this context that the Women's Component Plan (WCP) was introduced by the state government by earmarking 10 per cent of the state's plan outlay towards specifically targeted programmes for women. This was a proactive step to incorporate the gender perspective into the process of democratic decentralisation.

In 2008, the Government of Kerala started Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) by introducing gender intensive allocations in the budget. The author has analysed the State Budget through a gender lens and suggested the institutional mechanisms with the purpose of collecting gender disaggregated fiscal data which had been initiated at the state level. In the 2008 budget speech, the Finance Minister of the Government of Kerala announced that the state would be piloting gender responsive budgeting and establishing an office in the Department of Finance to co-ordinate data and information. Subsequently, the selected government ministries in the state designed innovative gender sensitive programmes related to infrastructure.

## Impact of Gender Budgeting

Research has shown that gender budgeting can lead to a decline in gender-based violence and improve intergovernmental fiscal transfers. Furthermore, public investment policy can redress intra-household inequalities in terms of labour supply decisions by supporting initiatives that reduce the allocation of time in non-market work. Studies have also shown that gender budgeting efforts have significant impact on gender equality sensitive indices as compared to economic growth.

## Challenges and Future Directions

Despite the progress made in implementing gender budgeting initiatives, there are still challenges to be addressed both at the national and sub national level. One of the key challenges is to give gender budgeting legal standing than a fiscal fiat. Another challenge is to incorporate care economy policies into macroeconomic frameworks, which can help to reduce the allocation of time in non-market work and promote more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

Though gender budgeting is a powerful tool for promoting gender equality, feminisation of governance needs to reshape power structures and decision-making processes. It has to challenge the existing norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality to ensure inclusivity. By integrating unpaid care economy and strengthening gender budgeting processes, governments can ensure that their budgets are more responsive to the needs of women and ultimately leading to a more equitable society. With continued efforts and commitment, gender budgeting can be a game-changer in promoting gender equality.

> Kerala's gender budget has a year-on-year increase of 3.8 per cent in the allocation. The state has allocated Rs. 4840.12 crore, which is 20.8 % of the total Plan Budget of Rs. 23285 crore in 2025-26 excluding the allocation of Local Self Government Institutes. -Foreword, Gender Budget 2025-26, Govt. of Kerala

*(The author is a Professor at NIPFP, an elected Member of the Governing Board of Management at the International Institute of Public Finance (IIPF) Munich, a pioneer economist in institutionalizing gender budgeting in India, former Chief Economic Advisor (2004) to Govt. of India, and a research affiliate at the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, New York.) Books: Fiscal Policy for Sustainable Development in Asia Pacific: Gender Budgeting in India (Palgrave Macmillan), Fiscal Consolidation, Budget Deficits, and Macroeconomics (Sage Publications) Social Sector in Decentralized Economy: India in the Era of Globalization (co-author, Cambridge University Press. The author's working paper on Gender responsive budgeting, as fiscal innovation: Evidence from India on "Processes" in which Kerala is a case study was published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, London.)*

A new policy has been formulated followed by a clear Action Plan for community based palliative care to carry out regular house visits for bedbound patients and medicines are delivered freely at home by the Local Governments.
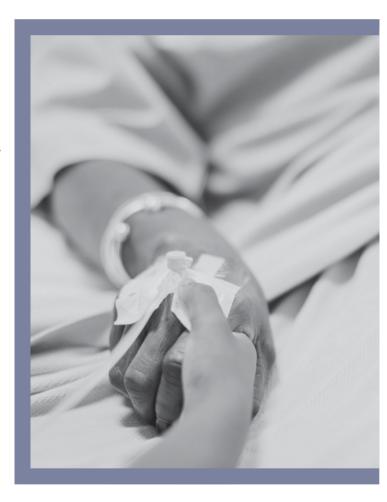
# COLLECTIVE COMPASSION



**S M VIJAYANAND IAS  (Retd.)**

Lie in her bed without moving, just gazing out of the window; O. Henry's *Last Leaf* better explains the condition of a palliative patient and how he or she has to be taken care of. Having lost confidence in life and despair in the eyes palliative patience need better physical and mental care and community support. Kerala is the leader in the country in community based Palliative Care offering almost universal coverage to every person in need. This is led by the Village Panchayats and Municipalities, actively supported by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and with a lot of individual volunteers supporting the initiative. Interestingly, even political parties run Palliative Care programmes.

## Stroke of Serendipity

Initiated in a small way in Kozhikode Medical College by Dr. M.R. Rajagopal and his associate Dr. Suresh Kumar, Kerala's impressive palliative care started with local outreach gradually attracting voluntary action. In the initial years the processes and protocols evolved. Soon Village Panchayats particularly from Kozhikode and Malappuram districts started showing interest. In 2008 a Policy was approved by the Health Department. Immediately the Local Self Government Department incorporated it into the People's Plan,



**The most critical element of the programme is the voluntary effort by organisations and individuals.**

initially giving the task of identification of eligible persons and providing care services to the Kudumbashree network. Thereafter the Local Governments hired Palliative Care Nurses in all the Primary Health Centres (PHCs). Later, with the support of the National Health Mission (NHM), secondary Palliative Care Nurses were appointed in the Community Health Centres (CHCs).

A policy of none left behind is followed and after identification of eligible persons, outreach services are provided through the Palliative Care Nurse supported by Junior Public Health Nurses (JPHN), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and, wherever needed, the Doctors. Regular house visits are carried out particularly for bedbound patients and medicines are delivered at home. Most of the medicines are purchased by the Local Governments who also supply comfort devices to the needy patients. After a decade of experience a new and improved Policy has been adopted followed by a clear Action Plan.

Now the Palliative Care programme has a fully functional model and is well institutionalised. Of course, there is need for greater effort in urban areas and a referral system needs to be improved.

## Empathy Institutionalised

It is no exaggeration that India looks up to Kerala. Already Tamil Nadu has adopted substantial elements from the Kerala experience. Karnataka has recently launched a pilot under the leadership of Panchayats. Himachal Pradesh has declared its intention to suitably adapt the Kerala Model, but with focus on Village

**Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Telangana are emulating the model of Kerala's Palliative Care**

Communities. States like Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Telangana have evinced keen interest. Beyond India it has interesting lessons to offer to developing countries also.

The funding mostly comes from the Local Governments with some support from the NHM. It is estimated that more than 1/3rd of the expenditure would be in the form of voluntary contribution. The voluntary effort by CSOs and individuals and the entire community system by providing psycho-social support to the patients and, food also wherever needed; perform their best as the role of the character Behrman did through his masterpiece as O. Henry portrays in his short story The Last Leaf. They work over night from the last leaf falling.

*The author is former Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India and former Chief Secretary, Kerala. He is currently the Chairman, Centre for Management Development*

Continuing to reinvent itself and to focus critical attention to the empowerment of women at the lower end of the socio economic spectrum Kudumbashree was reviewed along with the Andhra model of SHG to restructure Swarn Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana.

# KUDUMBASHREE

# A PATHWAY TO NATIONAL RECOGNITION

**SARADA MURALEEDHARAN IAS (Retd.)**

Kudumbashree, formally began in 1998 has managed to stay the course for 27 years, which is a national record for a programme of such nature. The timing of the programme coincided closely with the launch of the *Swarn Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)* at the national level for poverty alleviation built around the idea of Self Help Groups and micro enterprises. Even though, on the ground, the two interventions ran parallel to each other and many of the Kudumbashree neighbourhood groups were canvassed as SHGs for the SGSY and were able to access the subsidy support available for group enterprises. This meant that at the national level, Kudumbashree was conflated with SGSY, and many of its innovative experiments with enterprises were noticed by the Central Ministries. This was further reinforced by the Radhakrishna Committee on credit linked issues under SGSY in 2009 and had come to the conclusion that the Andhra Pradesh Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) and Kerala Kudumbashree models were the most sustainable of all SHG programmes in the country.

## There were three specific components of Kudumbashree that were acknowledged

1. Kudumbashree did not work at the level of the SHG (NHG) alone. Its federated three tier structure – the NHG, the ADS and the CDS brought out a consolidation of strength within the community network, and made it more resilient. Communication was faster, and more reinforced; solidarity among the groups was higher, and access to development opportunities and to government officials, the LSG leadership and to other important stakeholders was vastly improved.

2. Kudumbashree worked in mission mode that the team working for Kudumbashree were more motivated and goal oriented, rather than just merely satisfying the numerical achievements. They worried about sustainability of the NHGs formed, the activities they undertook, the opportunities that could be leveraged, the challenges faced by the women in handling money in banks, the feasibility of some of the micro enterprises started, the ways by which income generation could be strengthened, the space for engagement with local governments and other community structures, among others.

3. Kudumbashree relied heavily on community resource persons for training and capacity building who understood the women of Kudumbashree much better than the regular trainers, and could speak to them as one of them, which was very important in creating trust and comfort. They supported Kudumbashree by organising large scale trainings, disseminating new programmes and ideas, bringing matters of concern to the network that needed careful and calibrated interventions - from sustaining livelihoods projects like fallow land cultivation or Ksheerasagaram on the one hand and social and political empowerment concerns on the other. It was also one of the reasons for women to move out of their panchayats for training and to be away from their homes for a long duration. The better the capacity building, the greater the empowerment, the stronger the resilience.

These were similarities that were found with the Andhra model of SHG federations as well, and were identified by the Committee as areas for restructuring of the SGSY programme. When NRLM was formed, it took these principles to be its cornerstones.

However, NRLM did not adopt the model of LSG convergence that Kudumbashree stood for. This was primarily because of the low levels of empowerment of the Panchayati Raj institutions in most States, and the mistrust in local power structures that were likely to discourage women from coming into their own. The 14th Central Finance Commission award brought in a new development complexity – the huge resource transfer that was made to gram panchayats and municipalities across the country. The prospect of coordinating the MGNREGS works with the CFC grants also pushed the possibility of bringing women actively into the local

## The work of Kudumbashree has generated domestic and international interest from multiple angles

- The scope for community participation in local governance processes

- The large scale empowerment of women on the social, economic and political fronts through process driven interventions

- Women in agriculture and synergies for sustainable agriculture

- Local economic development  - livelihoods on scale

- Community resource organisations for capacity building, accounting, business development, strategic gender concerns etc.

- Convergence over multiple sectors – health, education, sanitation, waste management, livelihoods, social entitlements, strategic communication etc.

- Resilience for disaster management and climate adaptation

- Destitute rehabilitation and protecting interests of the marginalized including the disabled and the migrant communities

- Action for child rights and empowerment, attention to geriatric care and support through community interface

development paradigm into focus. This led to a renewed interest in Kudumbashree.

Under NRLM, a special entity called the National Resource Organisation had been created in order to take the message and philosophy of NRLM into the intensive blocks of the programme through specialised community resource person- mentors who would handhold the local networks to practice and inculcate the principles of NRLM. Kudumbashree was roped in as NRO for panchayati raj convergence as well as for handholding micro businesses (non-farm livelihoods), while SERP of Andhra Pradesh/Telengana was the main NRO to handhold SHGs in the new areas for the core programme. The Kudumbashree experience was critical in developing the NRLM framework for SHG convergence with PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions).

Kerala being the only state to have experimented strategically with issues in local businesses and micro enterprises at the time, looking inwards for community mentors - micro enterprise consultants (MECs) – to help develop small time entrepreneurs especially from among women SHGs develop viable businesses and work local markets was also a contribution that Kudumbashree made to NRLM. Kudumbashree has given support to 25 States and Union territories since its recognition as an NRO of NRLM.

In the urban space, the urban SHG formation, consolidation and enterprise development had been areas where Kudumbashree was seen as pioneer. Kudumbashree was the only state level mission at the time that worked seamlessly across rural and urban geographies. Therefore the blue print for urban poverty reduction under the NULM (National Urban Livelihood Mission) had only the Kudumbashree urban experience to fall back on, apart from the NRLM template. However NULM incorporated several new elements like the street vendor interventions that Kudumbashree had to newly develop capacity for.

International entities like the World Bank and UN have picked up on multiple aspects of the Kudumbashree story and triggered international interest including that of academic institutions, to the extent that Kudumbashree has made it to the syllabus of international development courses abroad.

The continuity of government support for Kudumbashree over the years has been very important for its continuing to reinvent itself and to focus critical attention to the empowerment of people at the lower end of the socio economic spectrum. It has also been critical to the continuing saga of building a society whose foundational pillars are growth and equity.

*The author is former Chief Secretary to Govt. of Kerala, CEO of NRLM, Ministry of Rural Development and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Govt. of India.*

The Government of India rolled out Kerala's SPC program nationwide in 2018. The Home Department of Kerala makes history further by successfully implementing Transformative Youth Initiatives Schemes D-DAD and Project HOPE.

# TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVES
# EMPOWERING YOUTH SHAPING FUTURES

**S. AJEETHA BEGUM IPS**

A high pitched voice issues a command and hundreds of synchronised swing of arms strikes the air! What better make us understand the spirit of the Student Police Cadet (SPC) than their electrifying March Past in 14 districts of Kerala every year on August 15! In the realm of contemporary education and social initiatives, few programs initiate the transformation of young lives as profoundly as the Student Police Cadet (SPC), Digital D-Addiction Centres (D-DAD), and Project HOPE in the country. These groundbreaking initiatives of Kerala, implemented with foresight and compassion embody the intersection of education, civic responsibility and community-driven change. Each project in its distinct way shapes the future of youth, addressing critical issues such as law enforcement engagement, digital addiction and the restoration of educational opportunities.

## SPC to Learn and Deliver Service

Implemented collaboratively by the Departments of Home and Education with support from various government departments, the project SPC has completed 15 successful years, and has earned national and international acclaim as the largest youth initiative in India. In 2018, the Government of India rolled out the SPC program nationwide, marking another milestone of SPC Kerala's journey. The program's central motto, We Learn to Serve, encapsulates its mission to instil a deep sense of duty and commitment toward both self-improvement and societal service.

The SPC program centres on creating a constructive relationship between youth and law enforcement and thereby contributing to effective internal policing. It teaches respect for the law while fostering empathy for vulnerable segments of society and developing resilience against social vices such as substance abuse and intolerance. A well-structured two-year training regimen instils qualities such as leadership, discipline, comradeship, and selfless service in cadets while strengthen their commitment to family, community and the environment; transforming them into proactive change agents and conscientious citizens. Rooted in the core values of the Indian Constitution, the program seeks to foster a secular outlook and spirit of adventure.

The success stories of SPC are documented. The *Swapna* Project in Kozhikode raised an astounding Rs. 8-lakh to rebuild a Cadet's house which was destroyed by falling of a tree. Similarly, the SPC facilitated a liver transplant when the father of a cadet fell critically ill. The cadets' ability to mobilize resources and demonstrate unwavering commitment to fellow cadets speak volumes about the program's underlying ethos of selfless service.

The program's environmental concern is also reflected in project *Madhuravanam*, launched in 2023. With the support of local authorities and environmental agencies, the cadets planted and nurtured saplings of rare and endangered trees in Kasargod.

## D-DAD for Mental Health of Youth

Online gaming and social media addiction among children are a serious concern in the State. In response, the Digital D-Addiction Centres (D-DAD), equipped with state-of-the-art technology are established to support children grappling with digital addiction. A team of experts in behavioural psychology are involved in counselling, family involvement, and structured routines to reintegrate addicted children into healthy social environments and educational settings.

Initially launched in six cities—Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode, and Kannur—D-DAD focuses on providing interactive education, device-free retreats, and scientifically proven techniques for behaviour modification. The centres have handled 1079 cases as of 2025 March out of which 770 are under treatment; 175 referred to other specialists; 735 successfully resolved and 29 clients were dropped out.

## Project HOPE

In 2017, Project HOPE was launched with a goal of providing educational support to school drop outs or those who failed in board exams. This initiative primarily targets children from marginalised communities, which include tribal, coastal, and impoverished families, offering them a second chance to continue their education by focusing on life skills, confidence-building, and academic tutoring and helping students rebuild their self-worth and pursue their academic goals.

The program has been instrumental in transforming the lives of 7,025 students between 2017

**Project HOPE helps drop outs rebuild their self-worth and empowers them to pursue their academic goals.**

and 2024. A remarkable 62.11% of these students successfully passed their SSLC and Plus Two exams illustrate the transformative power of D-DAD.

The human face of Kerala Police and their innovations are making history in bringing social change. The SPC, D-DAD, and Project HOPE have demonstrated the potential of education, social responsibility, and youth engagement with law enforcement. These holistic approaches empower students in shaping their communities. Together, they reflect the larger goal of fostering an enlightened, responsible and empowered generation capable of navigating and influencing the complexities of modern society.

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# FROM LOKA KERALA SABHA TO VISWA BHARATHA SABHA



**K.N. HARILAL & C.S. AKHIL**

Many raised eye brows when Loka Kerala Sabha (LKS) was launched in 2018; many thought to bring Malayali Diaspora across the globe under one platform is an illusionary idea. Now, this model is at the juncture of national expansion with the recent decision of the Ministry of External Affairs to prepare a frame work for Indian Diaspora in the model of LKS to introduce in other states vindicates the success of this pioneering achievement of a regional government to engage its global Diaspora community while bringing an illusion into a sustainable reality. With the launch of LKS, a Diaspora of 4 million Non Resident Keralites across 103 countries and 25 Indian states represented and addressed in their home state. The Department of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) plays a major role in organising LKS.

## Central Government Recognition

As mentioned, the initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs to take steps forward to present the Loka Kerala Sabha model to other states is a move followed by the recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee. The committee, in its report released in April, had praised the Loka Kerala Sabha and recommended the Ministry of External Affairs to take the initiative to implement similar Diaspora platforms in other states.

## Vision, Structure and Relevance

LKS represents the latest in the history of democratisation movements in the State. Viewed in the

broad sense it is a movement of Keralites all over the world aiming the reunion and connect to their homeland. It is a response to the process of de-territorialisation of Malayali community.

In LKS the resident Keralites are represented by the members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly as well as members of the Parliament. Non-resident Keralites are represented by nominated members from different parts of the world according to the migrant population. LKS institutionalises democratic participation of Non-Resident Keralites in policy formulation through its unique structural framework. Meetings are conducted by a presidium headed by the speaker of the Kerala Legislature. The Chief Minister, his Cabinet colleagues and senior officers of the State Government participate in the LKS.

Loka Kerala Sabha meetings are convened once in two years. Between 2018 and 2024 LKS was convened four times. Additionally, three regional meetings were held in UAE, UK, and USA. The external members of the LKS include Kerala's Global Diaspora, with representation from Gulf Cooperation Council countries (50 members); Europe and UK (19 members); Americas (6 members); Africa (12 members); Asia-pacific (17 members); other Indian states (36 members) and returnee NRKs (12 members).

## Recommendations from 4th LKS

The following key recommendations from LKS delegates are being prioritized for implementation in the current financial year:

- Pravasi Mission: A unified and sustainable framework to consolidate and enhance returnee reintegration programs under NORKA.

- NORKA Police Station: A dedicated grievance redressal mechanism to handle migration-related complaints from NRKs and their families, ensuring faster legal support.

- Retirement Homes and Assisted Living Facilities: Proposed under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models to provide secure and dignified living options for the elderly parents of expatriates.

- NRK Professional Forum: A platform to engage the global Malayali professional community in policy innovation and knowledge-sharing.

- Student Migration Advisory Portal: A digital interface offering verified information, crisis support, and country-specific guidance for student migrants and aspirants.

- Regional LKS Assemblies in New Regions such as Australia, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

> LKS addresses critical gaps in traditional Diaspora engagement models. The platform's regional representation ensures inclusion of often-marginalized groups including domestic workers, undocumented migrants, and returnees facing reintegration challenges.

A distinctive feature of LKS is its inclusion of special invitees - prominent Diaspora members, Overseas Citizens of India (OCI), and representatives from emerging Malayali communities in smaller nations. The 2024 assembly welcomed 241 special invitees who participated with full privileges in deliberations. These invitees particularly represented island nations and territories with emerging NRK population that do not yet warrant regular membership quotas.

LKS addresses critical gaps in traditional Diaspora engagement models. The platform's regional representation ensures inclusion of often-marginalized groups including domestic workers, undocumented migrants, and returnees facing reintegration challenges. The LKS has facilitated the implementation of numerous transformative policies. Notable achievements include multiple programmes for reintegration on returnees, the Loka Keralam Online Portal for digital engagement, and specialized initiatives like the NORKA Women's Cell addressing gender-specific migration challenges. During crises like COVID-19, LKS networks facilitated the repatriation of NRKs and established help desks across 14 countries.

The Government of Kerala is at the juncture of formalising the LKS through legislation, which would cement its position as a global benchmark in subnational diaspora governance. By transforming NRKs from passive remittance providers to active governance stakeholders, LKS would exemplify how regional governments can harness transnational citizenship for inclusive development offering valuable lessons for migration governance worldwide.

Kerala's legacy of mobilisation and collective action has reached new heights with the introduction of LKS. Kerala is a land of social innovations. India has having one of the largest Diaspora and the biggest remittances receiving country in the world. Unifying this great strength spread across the globe, a truly functional Viswa Bharatha Sabha would enrich the country and empower the Indian Diaspora.

*K.N. Harilal is the Chairman of the 7th Kerala State Finance Commission; C.S. Akhil is the Program & Research Lead at Loka Kerala Sabha Secretariat, Government of Kerala*

Since its inception, the RT Mission has facilitated over ₹93-crore in cumulative revenue for local communities. More than 25,000 local entrepreneurs have been empowered to participate in Kerala's thriving RT network. Over 1,50,000 families have directly or indirectly benefited from RT Mission activities.

# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM
# BEACON OF INCLUSIVITY



### K. RUPESH KUMAR

In a world where tourism often risks turning destinations into mere backdrops for commercial gain, Kerala's Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission has charted a different path—one that celebrates people, protects the environment and strengthens local economies. Anchored in the principles of sustainability, equity, community empowerment and gender inclusion, Kerala's RT model has become a beacon of inclusive tourism—not just for India, but for the world.

## From Vision to Vibrant Movement

What began in 2008 as a pioneering pilot in Kumarakom has today evolved into a state-wide people's movement, institutionalised under the Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission Society (KRTMS). With proactive support from the State Government and robust community partnerships, KRTMS has re-imagined tourism as a tool for transformation—placing people, not profits, at the centre of tourism development.

KRTMS ensures that tourism doesn't just cater to visitors' expectations—it uplifts the lives of local residents. By nurturing partnerships between communities and the tourism sector, Kerala has shown the world how travel can be meaningful, ethical and regenerative.

## Globally Awarded, Locally Rooted

Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission has received 22 national and international accolades, including recognition from the UNWTO, PATA, and World Travel Market. These honours affirm the global relevance of a model that blends participatory development with sustainability and innovation.

Yet its deepest success lies in how it translates global goals into local realities—connecting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with tangible outcomes in rural development, women's empowerment, ecological conservation and community resilience.

KRTMS does not merely manage tourism—it redefines it as a movement. A movement that bridges inequality, revitalises local economies, and builds hope.

## Training Hands, Transforming Lives

One of the Mission's most impactful contributions has been its systematic training and capacity-building initiatives. From fishermen to farmers, tribal youth to homemakers, more than 25,000 local entrepreneurs have been empowered to participate in Kerala's thriving RT network. These individuals are trained in hospitality, entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism practices, language skills and digital tools.

Crucially, over 17,000 women-led or women-inclusive units reflect Kerala's bold commitment to gender inclusion in tourism. From managing home stays and community kitchens to producing artisanal goods and leading tours, women have become key stakeholders and leaders in this transformational journey. The Women-Friendly Tourism initiative, designed to ensure safety, empowerment and visibility for women, is now a model being studied and adapted across India.

## Innovation at the Grassroots: STREET, PEPPER, and Model Villages

Kerala's RT ecosystem is also a hub of innovation, with community-led models shaping the way forward. Flagship programs like STREET (Sustainable, Tangible, Responsible, Experiential and Ethnic Tourism) and PEPPER (People's Participation for Planning and Empowerment through Responsible Tourism) show how tourism can be made more inclusive, place-based and people-owned.

Destinations like Perumbalam and Kanthalloor have become global examples of how the STREET model can be used to revitalise public spaces and strengthen local

identity. The Beypore RT Project in Kozhikode, along with the nearby Kadalundi initiative has transformed streets into open museums of culture and heritage. Visitors now walk through vibrant lanes showcasing traditional Uru ship building, local cuisine and artisanal crafts—designed and implemented in partnership with panchayats, local institutions and residents.

Likewise, Model RT Villages like Aimanam, Ezhumanthuruth and Koodaranji exemplify self-sustaining, eco-conscious tourism. These villages allow travellers to experience Kerala's soul—through the rhythms of rural life, ancient folk traditions and sustainable living practices.

## Revenues That Reach the Roots

Since its inception, the RT Mission has facilitated over ₹93-crore in cumulative revenue for local communities. Unlike top-down, extractive models, KRTMS promotes direct market linkages between tourism enterprises and grassroots producers—be it fresh produce, eco-friendly souvenirs, traditional crafts or home-cooked meals. Over 1,50,000 families have directly or indirectly benefited from RT Mission activities, illustrating the widespread economic and social impact of this inclusive approach.

As part of its experiential tourism focus, the Kerala Agri Tourism Network has created vibrant connections between farmers and travellers—bringing rural livelihoods into the spotlight through farm visits, agro-based experiences and organic tourism initiatives.

This model nurtures dignity, resilience and cultural integrity, while offering travellers genuine, immersive experiences—from toddy tapping and canoe rides to tribal dance performances and farm-to-plate meals.

## A Blueprint for India's Tomorrow

In Kerala, tourism is more than leisure—it is a relationship of trust, storytelling and shared progress. It is about communities opening their hearts and homes, and travellers becoming part of their transformation where every journey uplifts a village, every experience celebrates a tradition and every footprint leads toward a more just and sustainable tomorrow. As India moves toward a future driven by sustainable and inclusive growth, Kerala offers a tested and scalable model of change.

*The writer is CEO at Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission Society*

Photo: K.G. Santhosh

# VS THROUGH THE LENS

## R. PRASANTH

The air hung thick and heavy in the small room at the AKG Centre when I reached there soon after I heard the sad demise of the legendary political maestro, the last of 32 founding leaders of CPM and former Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan. The premises were full, humid and no space to move one's feet. Very little interactive experience I have had with him than my lenses, which is more passionate and emotional about him. How many occasions my camera lenses ran after him! Slowly, the room turned snowy due to evaporating sweat that was bursting out drops little by little.

VS had his last journey escorted by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M) General Secretary M.A. Baby, CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan among others. The mortal remains reached the Durbar Hall at the Secretariat in the capital city of Kerala at 9am on 22nd July to lie in state for the public to pay homage.

While, sitting on one side in the low-floor AC bus KL 15 A 407 that carried the mortal remains to Alappuzha, his home town, which took 24 hours to reach; I saw at a glance an ocean of people, a ten thousand human lenses filling the final memory scene in their eyes.

I have explored VS through my lenses many a times. He posed only for us when he was the chief minister that I clicked along with KG Santhosh Kumar who is the Additional Director of I&PRD now. Another special memory was that of a group photo of all MLAs along with him when he was the opposition leader.

Most of the MLAs despite their political party were busy clicking individual photo with VS who was patient until the last person left.

When the bus reached the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram City, among the crowd my lenses struck the sight of an old lady with bandage on one eye and canola in hand coming out of an eye hospital with the support of a bystander. People lined up on the street to watch the procession, several hailing the departed leader by raising revolutionary slogans. The cortege stopped at several points, at least 26 designated locations along the route. It was raining; after Attingal it was dark in the evening. The world was muted, except the slogan Illa, illa marichittilla, jeevikkunnu njangalilude (He lives through us). Many were running after the bus weeping.

At Kollam, Chavara and Karunagappally, the bus struggled hard to move ahead. A grandmother was hurrying near to the bus; her eyes were sparkling with the reflection of light on bursting tears. Many were standing on the roof tops of buses stopped side by for the procession to move. In some points, groups of nuns who otherwise prefer to a cloister were awaiting the procession. Another lady with a plastered, broken arm threw her other fist on the air and shouted slogans.

On a few biscuits and some bottles of water but feeling no fatigue I survived more than 48 hours with his mortal remains especially 24 hours within the bus. I clicked 7000 photos among which 100 were spot released to media.

VS received the guard of honour at Valiya Chuducadu Burial Ground in Punnapra of Alappuzha District. The legend who has seen the history and who himself made the history. A leader and his people; the bonding they cherish and the soul they shared. A pensive mood engulfed everyone. No slogans. I closed my camera lenses.

*The author is the Photographer at I&PRD, Govt of Kerala and the only photographer who accompanied the mortal remains of late V.S. Achuthanandan in his last journey.*

Kerala's poignant farewell to its beloved leader through the lenses of R Prasanth

Photo: R. Prasanth, I&PRD

An incisive gathering of industry experts converges to sculpt Kerala's cinematic policies, ensuring a thriving ecosystem where art and industry flourish harmoniously, nurturing both creativity and sustainability.

# SHAPING CINEMA'S FUTURE

**DIVYA S IYER IAS**

Cinema is a myth; an illusion capable of creating a unique experience for every viewer, Federico Fellini, the legendary filmmaker, famously described. Indeed, it is a medium so powerful that it can resonate deeply on a personal level with its audience and perhaps, one of the most influential tools of communication. The journey of Malayalam cinema, which began with the silent film Vigathakumaran in 1928, has steadily garnered international acclaim for its artistic integrity and captivating narratives.
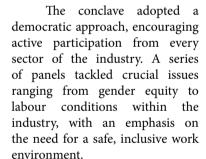
The vision of late Shaji N. Karun, as the Chairman of the Kerala State Film Development Corporation (KSFDC), paved the way for the idea of Kerala Film Policy. Under his leadership, consultations were held with organisations in the Malayalam film industry, insights were gathered, and a dedicated Film Policy Formulation Committee was formed to formulate a film policy. The comprehensive draft proposals prepared by the committee were presented at the conclave organised at the Kerala Legislative Assembly on 2nd and 3rd August 2025.

The central premise of the proposed policy revolves around the idea of recognising cinema as an industry, advocating for the rights and needs of its various sectors. The Kerala Cultural Department, under the aegis of the KSFDC and the Kerala Chalachitra Academy, organised this conclave that addresses the collective needs of industry veterans, emerging talents, and technical experts alike. The theme, "Good Cinema, Better Tomorrow", encapsulated the conclave's goal of creating an actionable, inclusive policy framework.

The event commenced with an iconic moment—Kerala's Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, marked the beginning of the conclave by striking the clapboard. In his inaugural address, the Chief Minister emphasised the need to safeguard Kerala's cultural heritage against films that might undermine its integrity, calling for unified resistance against cinematic works that promote communal discord.

The conclave adopted a democratic approach, encouraging active participation from every sector of the industry. A series of panels tackled crucial issues ranging from gender equity to labour conditions within the industry, with an emphasis on the need for a safe, inclusive work environment.

The first session, dedicated to gender justice and inclusion, addressed the essential need for equitable working conditions for all genders, progressive implications of implementing the POSH Act (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) within the industry, as well as addressing issues such as maternity leave and childcare facilities. The session discussed on how Malayalam cinema has made strides in achieving gender parity, especially in terms of remuneration based on skill rather than gender.

Another pivotal session focused on labour rights, particularly the unfair working condition of junior artists who often work extensive hours without adequate rest or fair compensation. The intricacies of labour laws and mechanisms for resolving grievances within the

industry was rigorously examined. The debate centred on reducing taxation on film tickets, which currently faces a staggering 33% tax burden, while OTT platforms remain largely untaxed.

The use of AI-powered VFX suites and flexible sound stages to elevate production quality also was another session that emphasised on the importance of skill development and the need for a robust pipeline of local talent.

The conclave also raised pertinent concerns about piracy and the protection of intellectual property. Additionally, there were deliberations on how to transform the Chitranjali studio into a hub for media innovation, with suggestions for a digital single-window clearance system to streamline the regulatory process and reduce bureaucratic hurdles. Further sessions explored

the nexus between cinema and tourism, with discussions on how Kerala could capitalise on film tourism to boost both its cultural profile and the local economy. The conclave also looked at innovative ways to incentivise filmmakers, including tax rebates and financial aid, to make Kerala an attractive destination for filmmakers globally.

The conclave brought together seasoned industry professionals, including the likes of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Sreekumaran Thampi, Mohanlal, Suhasini Mani Ratnam, Vetrimaaran among others alongside key political figures such as Speaker A.N. Shamsheer, Finance Minister K. N. Balagopal, Minister for Cultural Affairs Saji Cherian and Minister for Health, Women and Child Development Veena George as keynote speakers and esteemed figures such as Syed Akhtar Mirza, Ashish Kulkarni, Beena Paul, Revathy, Seethal Shyam, Govt officials such as Dr. K. Vasuki and P. Sathidevi and veteran journalist Shashi Kumar of the Asian College of Journalism as moderators and panelists.

As the curtains fell on the Kerala Film Policy Conclave, the sentiment echoed by Mohanlal during his opening remarks resonated strongly: "Malayalam cinema is ours." While certain areas of reform remain a work in progress, there is a collective belief that with this newfound vision, Malayalam cinema can indeed create a better tomorrow.

*The author is Director at Directorate of Culture and MD at Vizhinjam International Port*

**The central premise of the proposed policy revolves around the idea of recognizing cinema as an industry, advocating for the rights and needs of its various sectors.**

Eight Kerala urban local bodies broke into the top 100 rankings of Swachh Survekshan 2024–25. In total, 82 Urban Local Bodies secured places within the top 1,000 marks Kerala's best-ever performance. A year ago, not a single municipality from the state had made it to the top 1,000.

# KERALA'S CLEAN SWEEP

**U .V JOSE IAS (Retd.)**

Not long ago, Kerala's urban sanitation rankings were barely a blip on the national radar. But in a stunning turnaround that has surprised even seasoned observers, the State has leapt into the limelight with an unprecedented performance in the *Swachh Survekshan* 2024 — India's largest cleanliness survey. For the first time ever, eight urban local bodies from Kerala have landed among the top 100 cleanest cities in the country, marking a watershed moment in the state's urban hygiene journey.

There is more to celebrate considering the fact that there were no urban local bodies in the top 1,000 last year, as many as 82 ULB's, out of the total 93, secured places within the top 1000 this year. The top performers include Kochi Corporation (Rank 50), Mattannur (Rank 53), Thrissur Corporation (Rank 58), Kozhikode Corporation (Rank 70), Alappuzha Municipality (Rank 80), Guruvayur Municipality (Rank 82), Thiruvananthapuram Corporation (Rank 89) and Kollam (Rank 93). The Mattannur Municipality received a special national award for its remarkable transformation,



*Minister MB Rajesh receiving the award from Union Minister Manohar Lal during Swachh Survekshan 2024-25 Awards ceremony*

Mattannur Municipality wins Promising Swachh City Award
from the Union Government

# A PROMISING WIN

**SHAFNAS K**

Mattannur Municipality, located in Kannur district, has received national recognition for its outstanding efforts in cleanliness and waste management practices. It has become the first municipality in Kerala to win the prestigious Promising Swachh City Award from the central government. Last year, Mattannur Municipality was ranked 1553rd at the national level. This year, it rose significantly, securing the 53rd position, leaving behind 1500 other municipalities to win the award.

## A Co-ordinated Leap

The municipality's mega cleanliness drives, green clubs for children involving them in waste management activities and campaigns to revive water sources were some of the significant initiatives that contributed to this achievement. Water conservation efforts in the city,

> **Mattannur municipality improved its rank from 1553 to 53 in just one year.**

strengthening the Green Army for waste management, initiatives for Green Schools, awareness programs for businesses and activities led by religious institutions have played a crucial role. The efforts have been supported by local authorities, health department employees, sanitation workers, Green Army members, MGNREGA workers, Kudumbashree members, political leaders, traders, volunteers and the general public.

Mattannur Municipality earned special recognition at the national level for its remarkable achievements in waste management. The municipality's effective waste

management practices were recognised with the award. Mattannur successfully implemented 100% collection, storage and processing of non-biodegradable waste. The municipality also established systems for handling solid waste, liquid waste and sanitary waste, in addition to a 40 TPD (tons per day) chicken waste rendering plant under a public-private partnership (PPP) model, biomedical waste processing systems and comprehensive waste management programs.

## Innovation is the Key

Furthermore, innovative initiatives such as the Waste-to-Art project, Wonder Parks, IEC (Information, Education, Communication) awareness programs, RRR (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) centres, events adhering to green protocols and the conservation of water resources have helped transform Mattannur into a model for cleanliness excellence.

Through effective awareness campaigns targeting the reduction of waste, and the disposal of non-biodegradable materials in open spaces, the municipality was able to implement successful initiatives. Additionally, inviting schoolchildren to Material Collection Facilities (MCFs) and providing opportunities for them to spend the entire day there helped them understand the importance of cleanliness and waste management. Municipal Chairman N. Shajith points out that this was one of the key factors that contributed to the municipality's success.

Another major program by the municipality was the 'Green School Award,' which included cash prizes of ₹10,000 for first place, ₹7,000 for second place and ₹5,000 for third place. "At Mattannur Higher Secondary School, which has approximately 3,500 students, you won't even find a single chocolate wrapper in the compound," Shajith noted. This discipline and focus on cleanliness were vital factors that led to the municipality winning the award.

*The author is Information Assistant, I&PRD, Kannur*

climbing from rank 1854 in 2023 to 53 this year, and emerging as the top-performing municipality in Kerala.

The award, formally announced at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi was received by Kerala's Minister for Local Self-Government M.B. Rajesh, Mattannur Municipal Chairman N. Shajith, Additional Chief Secretary

Puneet Kumar, Special Secretary T.V. Anupama, Executive Director of Suchitwa Mission U.V. Jose, and Joint Director Muhammad Huwais. After receiving the awards the Minister emphasised: "These accolades reflect the sustained efforts of the State Government and its integrated approach to sanitation. It is the result of a

## Municipalities with Score Improvements

| SL NO | NAME OF MUNICIPALITIES | PREVIOUS SCORE (%) | CURRENT SCORE (%) | IMPROVE MENT (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Cherpulassery | 17 | 70 | 53 |
| 2. | Shoranur | 22 | 73 | 51 |
| 3. | Pattambi | 22 | 68 | 46 |
| 4. | Kochi | 19 | 65 | 46 |
| 5. | Ettumanoor | 22 | 68 | 46 |
| 6. | Koothuparamba | 23 | 68 | 45 |
| 7. | Marad | 16 | 60 | 44 |
| 8. | Alappuzha | 31 | 75 | 44 |
| 9. | GuruvayuR | 33 | 75 | 42 |
| 10. | Kodungalloor | 29 | 70 | 41 |

coordinated, multi-agency effort rooted in political will, administrative focus, and community engagement."

This collective performance has its roots in the *Malinya Muktham Nava Keralam* campaign launched in 2023. Conceived as a mission to make Kerala waste-free, the campaign catalysed several reforms at the local level. Waste dumps were cleared and remediated. Public spaces were repurposed into green areas and parks. Public toilets were renovated and modernised. Awareness drives were launched across communities. Murals appeared on walls with messages promoting hygiene and civic responsibility. In addition to the Local Self-Government Department and Suchitwa Mission, the Haritha Keralam Mission, Kudumbashree, CKCL and Kerala Solid Waste Management Project (KSWMP) also played key roles. The Suchitwa Mission played a coordinating role, offering technical support, monitoring progress and aligning local efforts with national evaluation criteria.

The Swachh Survekshan 2024–25 surveys introduced a revised marking system with a total of 12,500 marks, of which 10,000 were allocated to service-level progress and citizen feedback, and 2,500 to various sanitation certifications.

## ODF Certifications

Swachh Certifications are granted through a rigorous three-stage process comprising self-assessment, public declaration and third-party verification for the effectiveness and sustainability of sanitation systems, in which Kerala made notable progress. Thiruvananthapuram Corporation was awarded the Water Plus certification, indicating scientific treatment of all toilet waste and reuse of at least 20 per cent of treated waste water. Kochi, Kalpetta and Guruvayur received ODF Plus Plus status, while 77 municipalities earned the ODF Plus certification. These certifications contribute 1,200 marks to the Swachh Survekshan score.

## Municipalities Improve Scores by Up to 53%

The rapid rise in national rankings was led by municipalities. Cherpulassery improved its rank by over 3,500 positions to secure the seventh spot nationally. Shoranur climbed more than 3,200 ranks to reach fourth place. Kochi registered a leap of 3,000 positions.

## Garbage Free City Rankings

Kerala also made a strong showing under the Garbage Free City (GFC) star rating protocol receiving Alappuzha, Shoranur and Pattambi the prestigious three-star rating, while 20 others earned one-star status; 1,300 marks were allotted to this achievements. To qualify for one star, a city must meet the GFC protocol in at least 40 per cent of its wards which includes door-to-door waste collection, segregation of wet and dry waste, cleanliness in residential and commercial areas, twin litter bins in public spaces, functioning waste processing units, and penalties for bulk waste violators. Scientific landfills, clean water bodies and legacy waste remediation are also required. The threshold rises to 60 per cent for three stars, 80 per cent for five stars and 95 per cent for the highest seven-star certification.

Kerala's ability to shine in this competitive frame work is a reflection of its effective decentralised planning. Importantly, the campaign stressed on behaviour change and local ownership. The dedicated efforts of local bodies to introduce a systematic door-to-door waste collection, segregation at source and improved systems for transportation and scientific processing made this clean sweep. The road ahead may be long, but the direction is clear — towards cleaner, greener, and more resilient cities.

*The writer is Executive Director at Suchithwa Mission*

Infopark Third Phase, IBM's Ecosystem Incubation Centre, Lulu Twin Towers and CIAL's Proposed IT Park boost Kochi as India's next big IT innovation hub

# KOCHI EXPANDS AS IT POWERHOUSE

**C.D. RENCY**

Kochi's IT tapestry, woven by the threads of careful planning on well-developed infrastructure, set to add yet another jewel with state government issuing an official order to expand Infopark. The state government in the order, issued on 2025 July 19, has instructed the Greater Cochin Development Authority to pool 300 acres in Kizhakkambalam for the Kochi Inforpark's third phase. As many as 352 new companies started their business in the phase one and two of the Infopark in the past 10 years creating over 73500 job opportunities.

Kochi's IT sector has seen a steady growth since the inception of Infopark, from 100 acres with four companies in 2004 to 583 companies in 2025. The latest entry is tech giant IBM Software's Ecosystem Incubation Centre (EIC). Started as a small unit providing employment to close to 100 people IBM has grown exponentially in the last three years to grant jobs to over 3500 IT professionals.

The EIC is an initiative that aims at fostering continuous learning, upskilling, and co-innovation, making it a launchpad for the next generation of innovators and tech leaders, says the Senior Vice President of IBM Software Dinesh Nirmal. "Whenever we consider expansion, we evaluate three critical factors such as access to the right talent, a supportive business environment, and robust infrastructure. Over the years, our experience of setting up a premier IBM Software Lab in Kochi with the support of the Kerala government and ecosystem has been exceptional." He adds further: "Kerala is a deep tech hotspot - boasting a vibrant startup community and skilled talent that is driving innovation. To build on this momentum, we launched the IBM Ecosystem Incubation Center in Kochi".

Kochi Smart City too added a state-of the-art IT park; the Lulu Twin Towers, to it ever expanding landscape in June this year. Sprawled over 12.74 acres, the twin towers can accommodate a workforce of over 30,000 employees. "Kochi has a number of favourable conditions to become a sought-after destination for IT companies. The rent is almost half when compared to cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad. The staff attrition rate in Kochi is the lowest in the country. Kochi is also well-connected with water metro, metro, the airport. The city also has some of the best hospitals and schools in the country," says Abhilash Valiyavalappil, director and CEO of Lulu IT Parks.

The IT growth story does not end there. The Cochin International Airport (CIAL) authorities have proposed an IT park on their premises. The proposed IT and ITES Park will be set up on 20 acres and is expected to increase the non-aero revenue of the CIAL from the current ration of 50:50 to 40:60 (aero and non-aero revenue). CIAL has invited expression of interest from consultancies to do a feasibility study. The master plan for the park will be ready within three months.

Kochi's strategic expansion, talent pool, and infrastructure are cementing its position as India's next big IT innovation hub.

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Kerala became the first State in India to achieve digital literacy by adopting Digi-Keralam campaign inspired by the success of Pullampara which became the first Grama Panchayat in the country to achieve total digital literacy.

# JOURNEY TO TOTAL DIGITAL LITERACY

**SURAJ SHAJI IAS**

The government services in Kerala have shifted to a mouse click away for public with the successful introduction of e-governance. Need for smooth access to e-services for public to issue certificates, facilitate treasury payments, bank transactions and uploading applications for various government services among others have made the Government to initiate the Digi-Keralam campaign to achieve complete digital literacy to people from all walks of society despite the age barriers.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of digital skills. With schools, workplaces and essential services moving online, access to technology and digital proficiency became more crucial than ever. The pandemic also highlighted the digital divide, particularly in India, where a significant portion of the population lacked basic digital literacy. The Government of India launched the Digital India initiative in 2015, aiming to create a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy then gained momentum during the pandemic. This initiative introduced several digital literacy programs, including the National Digital Literacy Mission and the Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA), designed to equip citizens with essential digital skills.



**Digi Keralam brand ambassador Sarasu operates her mobile; Minister for Education V Sivan Kutty, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Minister for LSGD M B Rajesh, Chief Secretary A Jayathilak and Minister for Electricity K Krishnankutty are watching it.**

## Pioneering Pullampara

In alignment with Digital India, Kerala launched its campaign, Digi Keralam, to ensure that every citizen in the state becomes digitally literate. This initiative was inspired by the success of the Digi-Pullampara campaign, which made Pullampara the first Grama Panchayat in India to achieve total digital literacy. Recognised nationally, Digi-Pullampara became a model for the broader Digi-Keralam program.

Digi-Keralam adopted a comprehensive and inclusive approach to achieving digital literacy for all citizens aged 14 and above. Unlike many programs that train only one member per household, this initiative targeted entire families, ensuring that digital literacy reached a diverse group, including students, working professionals and senior citizens. This inclusive model was key to its success, as it ensured that no one was left behind.

> **Training has been provided in smart phone usage, internet navigation and online access to government services despite age barriers.**

## Systematic Approach

The implementation of Digi-Keralam was organised into three key phases: data collection, training and evaluation. During the first phase, local authorities conducted surveys to identify citizens lacking basic digital skills. This helped ensure that the program reached those most in need. In the second phase, training sessions were provided to participants, covering essential skills such as smart phone usage, internet navigation and online access to government services. The training was designed to be user-friendly and conducted in local languages to maximise engagement. The third phase focused on evaluating participants' progress.

After completing the training, participants were assessed through a mobile app and web portal, where they demonstrated their newfound skills by completing tasks such as using smart phones to access government

**Survey Results**

| | |
|---|---|
| Persons who lacked digital literacy | 21,88,398 |
| Persons who received training | 21,87,966 |
| Persons who passed evaluation | 21,87,667 |
| Completion rate | 99.98%. |

portals or making digital transactions. This evaluation was also facilitated by volunteers, but it was strictly ensured that a volunteer who provided training to a citizen never conducted his/her evaluation. A third-party evaluation was also conducted across the state, using the services of officers from the Department of Economics and Statistics.

## Participatory Model

The success of Digi-Keralam was largely due to the involvement of thousands of volunteers and local organisations. In true Kerala spirit, community participation played a crucial role, with over 2,57,000 volunteers taking part in the initiative. Youth groups, Kudumbashree volunteers, Kerala State Literacy Mission Preraks, members of the Library Council, NSS, NCC, IEEE and various other organisations collaborated to ensure the program's success. Local government representatives and ward committees played an essential role in implementing the initiative, reaching every corner of the state.

The results of Digi-Keralam have been outstanding. A survey was conducted among 83,45,879 families, totalling 1,50,82,536 individuals. According to the survey estimates, 21,88,398 citizens in the state lacked digital literacy. Among these, 21,87,966 citizens received training in smart phone usage, with an outstanding 21,87,667 passing the evaluation, resulting in an impressive completion rate of 99.98%. This remarkable achievement makes Kerala the first state in India to achieve total digital literacy, solidifying its position as a leader in digital empowerment.

Kerala's achievement in digital literacy demonstrates its dedication to education and its capacity to use technology for social empowerment. By ensuring that all its citizens are digitally literate, Kerala is creating a more inclusive and connected future.

*The author is Director at*
*Urban Affairs Department, Govt. of Kerala.*

# TECHGENTSIA'S INDIGENOUS TECH JOURNEY



**JOY SEBASTIAN**

In the quiet town of Alappuzha, Kerala, a decade-old software company quietly honed its expertise in a niche yet critical field: real-time communication. Little did the world know that this unassuming firm, Techgentsia Software Technologies Private Limited, founded in 2009, was on the cusp of playing a transformative role in India's digital sovereignty. Their journey culminates in BharatVC, the indigenous video conferencing platform now serving the very backbone of Indian governance.

## A Decade of Quiet Innovation

Techgentsia's early years, starting in 2009, saw them dabbling in diverse tech domains including software development services and product engineering. However, by 2013, a clear strategic pivot emerged. The company dedicated its focus entirely to internet communication and collaboration, particularly video conferencing. This wasn't a casual shift; it was a deep dive into the complex world of software-based multi-party video solutions, a realm then dominated by expensive, hardware-centric systems.

Their relentless research and development bore fruit. Techgentsia developed VCONSOL®, a sophisticated software solution that proved to be a significant disruptor. Its capabilities quickly garnered attention from leading video conferencing service providers in the US and Europe, solidifying Techgentsia's reputation as a formidable R&D powerhouse in the communication technology space.

## The Call for 'Made in India'

The year 2020 brought unprecedented challenges and, with it, a clarion call for self-reliance. As the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped global communication, the Government of India, through the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), launched the "Innovation Challenge for Development of Video Conferencing Solution." This wasn't just a competition; it was a national imperative to find a secure, robust, scalable, customizable, and on-premise deployable video conferencing platform, entirely "Made in India," to safeguard governmental and official communications.

Against a formidable field of approximately 2000 competing companies, Techgentsia stepped forward with VCONSOL®. Their years of dedicated R&D, often away from the national spotlight, now positioned them perfectly.

## BharatVC: A National Triumph

The announcement was a moment of national pride: Techgentsia's VCONSOL® was declared the winner of the MeitY Innovation Challenge, securing a prize of ₹10 million (1 Crore). This victory wasn't just financial; it was an endorsement of indigenous innovation at its highest level. VCONSOL® was subsequently rebranded by the Indian government as BharatVC, becoming the official video conferencing platform, hosted securely on the National Informatics Centre (NIC) cloud.

## What makes BharatVC truly unique and vital for India's digital infrastructure?

- True Indigenous Solution: BharatVC stands as a testament to India's growing capabilities in developing sophisticated software solutions from the ground up, ensuring data sovereignty and security.

- Seamless Legacy Integration: A significant challenge in government and public sector organizations is the widespread presence of older hardware-based video conferencing systems (H.323/SIP endpoints). BharatVC masterfully integrates with these legacy systems without requiring external bridges, a feature often missing in popular global platforms, ensuring a smooth transition and continued utility of existing infrastructure.

- Robust Deployment and Usage: Since November 2020, Techgentsia's engineers, working hand-in-hand with NIC's seasoned experts, have successfully deployed and facilitated thousands of high-level government meetings. During the intense second wave of COVID-19, BharatVC proved its resilience, being extensively used by MeitY for critical executive and senior-level communications across the nation.

- Scalability and Future Vision: The initial deployment included 30 MCU nodes, capable of handling 1500 HD ports. The future roadmap includes significant scaling, with plans for a large deployment in the multiple data centres and the commercialization of BharatVC through NICSI, the business arm of NIC.

- Beyond Video Conferencing: The core VCONSOL® engine is proving to be a versatile asset. It's being leveraged for other crucial government applications, including "Sandes," an instant messaging platform with multi-party video capabilities, further solidifying its role in India's digital ecosystem.

- Wider Adoption: The impact of VCONSOL® extends beyond the central government. The Government of Kerala has adopted it as its official video conferencing solution, branded as "VMeet Kerala."

- Pioneering AI-driven Language Translation: Techgentsia's innovation doesn't stop at video conferencing. They further solidified their position as a leader in indigenous tech by winning the Bhashini Grand Innovation Challenge by MeitY. This achievement recognized their solution for real-time speech-to-speech audio translation in various Indian languages using artificial intelligence. Their VCONSOL® platform was demonstrated to enable multilingual webinars, showcasing the potential to overcome India's linguistic diversity through technology. This win also secured them additional funding and contracts for government projects in this vital sector.

- Transforming the Indian Judicial System with VCONSOL® Court: Techgentsia's commitment to digital transformation has also made a profound impact on the Indian judiciary. Their specialized platform, VCONSOL® Court, is India's first role-based virtual courthouse solution. Successfully deployed by the High Court of Kerala since 2021, it has revolutionized judicial proceedings by enabling online court procedures, including complex cases like habeas corpus and POCSO cases. Furthermore, the High Court of Bombay, High Court of Karnataka, High Court for the State of Telangana and High Court of Himachal Pradesh has also adopted VCONSOL® Court for its hybrid mode of functioning, facilitating seamless virtual and physical hearings. This innovative solution supports various roles within the courtroom – from judges and prosecutors to advocates and the public – and enables controlled live streaming of court proceedings, enhancing transparency while adhering to strict legal protocols.

## A Symbol of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'

Kerala has a favourable IT environment for any Start Up with a vision can groom and grow. Techgentsia's journey, culminating in BharatVC, their pioneering work in AI-driven language translation, and their transformative solutions for the Indian judiciary, is more than just a corporate success story. It is a powerful narrative of resilience, foresight, and national contribution. From a modest beginning in Kerala, Techgentsia has emerged as a trusted brand in Indian public sector boardrooms, embodying the spirit of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) and demonstrating India's prowess in building world-class technology solutions for its own unique needs. Their commitment to innovation continues to shape the future of digital communication and governance in the country.

*The author is CEO at Techgentsia,*
*the official web conferencing partner of Govt of India*

Kerala's BUDS schools empower differently-abled children and their families through inclusive education, community support and a transformative vision.

# BRINGING UP DIFFERENTLY

**MYNA UMAIBAN**

In the quiet corners of Kerala, an unheralded revolution is reshaping the meaning of inclusion. Hope now speaks aloud—in the laughter of children once sidelined, in the newfound strength of mothers, and in classrooms that welcome every child, regardless of ability. At the heart of this movement lies BUDS— Bringing Up Differently-abled Souls—a community-led Kudumbashree initiative to transforming and redefining the very soul of social care and education in Kerala; a vision of inclusive India breathes life.

In many traditional households, the birth of a differently-abled child shifted the future silently—

especially for mothers that they became full-time caregivers, sacrificing their careers, personal ambitions, and social interactions. The emotional toll was heavy, the financial strain real, and yet the burden remained largely invisible to society.

Sheela, a mother from Thrissur, recalls: "I spent years confined within four walls, solely caring for my son. After enrolling him at BUDS, I began tailoring work. Now, I earn, he learns".

Zuhara shares a similar journey. Once tethered by care giving, she joined a Kudumbashree micro-enterprise when her daughter started at a BUDS school. "I never imagined having my own income. Today, I am not only a mother—I'm a business woman". These voices are not solitary—they echo across thousands of homes In Kerala.

Kerala's flagship mission for poverty alleviation and women's empowerment, BUDS represents a bold step forward: What if differently-abled children could be equipped with skills to lead independent, dignified lives?

Thus emerged BUDS Schools and Rehabilitation Centres—run by local self-governments with Kudumbashree's support. More than mere institutions, they are sanctuaries of learning, healing, and social reintegration.

At BUDS schools, children aged 5 to 18 receive specialized education in life skills, emotional development, communication, and creativity. For many, this marks their first venture beyond home—a step into a world that embraces their presence and potential.

For individuals above 18, BUDS Rehabilitation Centres (BRCs) offer vocational training in tailoring, craftwork, food processing, and more—turning dependence into self-worth.

Take Adil, 16, who has Down syndrome. Once non-verbal, he now speaks and confidently participates in school events. Or Jasla, trained at a BRC, who now operates a tailoring unit and supports her family. "Before BUDS, we felt alone. Now, my child has friends, he learns, and above all – he is happy." Latha, a mother, sums it up poignantly.

What distinguishes BUDS is its deeply community-driven approach. Parents, panchayats, and Kudumbashree work hand in hand to craft nurturing environments that reject exclusion and embrace diversity. "This isn't just about classrooms," says a Kudumbashree official. "It's about changing societal perceptions and affirming every child's right to dream."

Every August 16, Kerala celebrates BUDS Day, marking the inception of the first BUDS school in 2004 at Venganur—a pioneering collaboration between Kudumbashree and the local GramaPanchayat. Since then, the network has grown exponentially, touching thousands of lives.

Beyond academics, BUDS institutions honour ability through the BUDS Olympia—a vibrant sports and cultural festival where differently-abled children showcase their talent. Here, the true victory lies not in medals but in confidence, joy, and participation.

Crucially, BUDS also invests in those who care for these children. Teachers and caregivers (ayahs) are trained in innovative, neuro diverse pedagogy. Parents receive counselling, awareness training, and skill-building programs—empowering them as active partners in their child's journey. Children benefit from therapies that build emotional strength, social skills, and a sense of belonging.

This holistic ecosystem ensures that no child is merely enrolled—they are seen, heard, and celebrated. Challenges remain. In remote pockets, awareness is still scarce, and stigma persists. Yet, each success story adds momentum to the movement.

On June 2, all 378 BUDS institutions in Kerala hosted an admission festival, welcoming 13,081 new beneficiaries. With the participation of ministers, MLAs, and local communities, the event wasn't merely ceremonial—it signified a societal shift toward visibility, dignity, and shared responsibility. Gifts of umbrellas, learning kits, and school bags symbolized solidarity and care.

In a world that too often sidelines its most vulnerable, Kerala's BUDS initiative stands as a luminous example of what compassionate governance, community



participation, and unwavering vision can achieve. More than institutions, BUDS schools are beacons— illuminating paths for children who once dwelled in the shadows, and for mothers who dared to dream again. This is not merely Kerala's success; it is an invitation to the world: to build societies where no life is overlooked, and every soul is nurtured to shine.

*The writer is the author of many collection of short stories, novels and essays and a recipient of Kerala State Institute for Children's Literature Award.*

AI models are forced to fill the gaps by guessing when databases fail to maintain properly structured and verified information. Recognizing this KELTRON has developed a comprehensive and scalable Information Disambiguation framework for the government-to-public as well as institutional and business communication.

# A NEW DIGITAL LIFELINE

**K. JAYAKUMAR**

Google searches for 'Kalvari Mount Viewpoint in Idukki', has displayed an unrelated private phone number as the contact information in Google's Knowledge Graph, a case study reveals. Directions pointed to the wrong location, while an on-site government-owned restaurant was not listed at all. The result was a steady stream of confusion among visitors, missed revenue for public services, and a clear example of how unverified online information can erode confidence in official institutions.

Increasingly, people have come to rely not only on traditional search engines but also on the growing wave of Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and DeepSeek. These platforms promise instant answers in plain language, allowing anyone to ask about anything. Yet, AI systems are not infallible. Another example involved a prominent museum in Thiruvananthapuram, which appeared online with conflicting addresses and duplicate listings that had never been claimed by the authorities. If no one steps forward to claim ownership of these listings, others can take control, modify the information, and redirect

public interest elsewhere.

AI models do not possess intrinsic judgment to separate truth from speculation or official data from hearsay. Instead, they aggregate information from countless sources, many of which remain unverified or out of date. When data bases fail to maintain properly structured and verified information, AI models are forced to fill in the blanks by guessing. Sometimes these guesses are harmless approximations. Other times, they create confusion, financial loss, and lasting damage to public trust.

Conversely, when such systems are not maintained, the vacuum is quickly filled by what experts call "astroturfing." Private interests, competitors, or opportunistic marketers seize the –pace to promote their own services, sometimes even blending or replacing official data.

## Powerful, but Prone to Error

This is where Generative AI becomes a double-edged sword. Its great strength—summarizing diverse sources into an answer also makes it prone to repeating and spreading misinformation when no authoritative version exists to guide it. Generative AI models produce text that sounds authoritative. For many users, especially those unfamiliar with the nuances of digital sourcing, this creates a false sense of certainty. Generative AI models are designed to break language barriers, serving users who search in multiple languages. If the underlying information is ambiguous, the technology's power to scale multilingual access only multiplies the problem.

## Disambiguation:
## A Blueprint for Building Trust

This is precisely why the concept of information disambiguation has emerged as an essential safeguard. At its core, information disambiguation refers to clarifying any data that could be interpreted in more than one way. It involves defining exactly what a word, name, address, or identifier refers to and ensuring that digital systems—whether search engines or AI—can connect that information to the right source without ambiguity. Unlike superficial SEO tweaks, true disambiguation involves integrating standardized schema code, verifying knowledge graph profiles, mapping web ontologies, and maintaining consistent metadata.

Perhaps the most powerful demonstration of this approach can be seen in well-developed knowledge graphs like that of the British Museum. When you search for the British Museum, the right-hand panel shows verified details: its logo, address, opening hours, collections, popular visiting times, and official website. This clarity empowers visitors to plan their experience without relying on third-party interpretations.

## Action at the Government Level

The urgency of information disambiguation at the Government level cannot be under estimated. The ability to deliver accurate, verified, and consistent information is now a matter of public service. When clarity is missing, misinformation becomes the default, eroding trust, distorting reputations, and diverting revenue away from those who have earned it. Recognizing the challenges posed by misinformation in the age of Generative AI, KELTRON (Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation Ltd.) has proactively developed a comprehensive and scalable Information Disambiguation framework tailored for government-to-public (G2P) interactions as well as institutional and business communication.

This solution leverages advanced web standards including JSON-LD, RDFa, microdata schema integration, knowledge graph management, semantic indexing, and web ontology frameworks, ensuring that every unit of official data—whether an address, contact detail, or service description—remain accurate, verifiable, and AI-ready. By implementing this system, departments can safeguard their digital identities, prevent manipulation of public-facing information, and foster greater transparency and trust. "The digital ecosystem has reached a stage where AI-generated answers are often accepted without question," says KELTRON's Managing Director Vice Admiral Sreekumar Nair (Retd). "In such an environment, protecting the integrity of official information is the foundation of trust. With our Information Disambiguation platform, KELTRON provides a pioneering solution that aligns Kerala with global best practices in digital governance," he informs.

The lesson is clear. In the age of instant digital responses, the only way to ensure that your institution, your services, and your reputation remain intact is to make information disambiguation a strategic priority. Whether it is tourism, health, education, or commerce, verified and structured data is no longer optional. It is the new standard that the public expects and the digital world demands. This initiative positions not only as a technology provider but also as a strategic partner in strengthening digital governance and empowering citizens with clear, reliable, and authoritative information across the government sectors.

*The author is an IT consultant*

A transformative campaign that empowered over 17-lakh people across Kerala to detect and confront cancer through early screening.

# HOPE FLOATS: KERALA BATTLES CANCER



**DR BIPIN GOPAL**

A silent revolution in public health is unfolding in Kerala with Arogyam Anandam, a movement toward preventive healthcare. Aimed, transforming fear into empowerment through the proactive detection and treatment of cancer, this trailblazing campaign represents both policy and pro-action. What began as a bold vision to mark World Cancer Day on February 4, 2025, has since evolved into one of India's largest cancer screening efforts. Spearheaded by Veena George, the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, and supported by experts, healthcare institutions, and women's groups, the campaign is a testament to the power of collaboration in saving lives.

## Story of Strength: A Life Saved

**Name: Suni, age-38**

**Location: Kareepra, Kollam District**

Suni, a homemaker from a modest background, visited a nearby screening camp at the encouragement of her Kudumbashree friend, more out of curiosity than concern. Though asymptomatic, she underwent a breast cancer screening at the Janakeeya Arogya Kendram in Madanthakad.

A lump was detected. A series of referrals followed, eventually leading her to Thiruvananthapuram Regional Cancer Centre. Diagnosed at an early stage of breast cancer, she now receives timely and potentially life-saving treatment.

Her story mirrors that of over 200 women who found a second chance—through awareness, action, and access.

## A Campaign Rooted in Purpose

The idea of Arogyam Anandam Akattam Arbudam was conceived during expert consultations involving oncologists from regional and private hospitals, public

health specialists, and global figures like Dr. M.V. Pillai from Mayo Clinic. After several brainstorming sessions, the campaign took structured shape with a strong focus on preventive screening.

The first phase of the campaign, spanning from February 4 to March 8, 2025, targeted women's cancers. The response was overwhelming—over 12 lakh women participated. Camps were conducted at Family Health Centres, Janakeeya Arogya Kendrams, and major hospitals. The campaign's strength lay in its extensive grassroots engagement—Kudumbashree units, NGOs, women's political wings, religious organizations, and even Technopark firms rallied behind the cause.

The barrier of stigma was gradually dismantled. Through one-on-one interactions and mass psychology, fears surrounding cancer diagnosis and treatment costs were addressed, encouraging women to step forward. Adding both star power and sincerity, actor Manju Warrier served as the brand ambassador, strengthening the campaign's reach and reliability.

## Efficiently Engineered Public Health Strategy

From the Chief Minister's formal inauguration to the Health Minister's hands-on coordination, the campaign was executed with precision. Nodal officers were appointed at every health institution, while state wide review meetings ensured accountability and continuity. A live dashboard developed by e-Health Kerala, under the Digital Health Mission, allowed real-time tracking and analysis. This digitised interface provided clarity and transparency.

## Impact in Numbers: A Landmark Milestone

Between February 4 and August 15, 2025, a remarkable 17.6 lakh people were screened for various cancers out of which 25,360 were referred for breast cancer, 29610 for cervical cancer, and 3662 for oral cancer. A total of 235 breast cancers, 73 new cases of cervical cancers, 39 new Oral cancer cases and 8 new Colorectal cancers were diagnosed as mentioned in the table below:

| Type of Cancer | Suspected | Diagnosed | Pre-malignant |
|---|---|---|---|
| Breast | 4,752 | 235 | 54 |
| Cervical | 12,753 | 73 | 213 |
| Oral | 159 | 39 | 7 |
| Colorectal | 32 | 8 | 9 |

## Extending Reach: Decentralised Cancer Care

Kerala has long faced an overwhelming cancer burden, with over 65,000 new cases annually, well above the national average. Until recently, treatment was centralized in three regional centres and five medical colleges, which are insufficient and inaccessible for many. To bridge this gap, the State Health Department launched Day Care Chemotherapy Centres at 26 district and taluk hospitals, decentralizing care. Patients now initiate treatment at cancer centres under oncologist supervision, and follow-up chemotherapy is delivered closer to home. This model minimizes travel, reduces expenses, and alleviates emotional strain—especially critical for lower-income patients.

> The state's triad of early detection, decentralized treatment, and affordable medication has begun to rewrite the narrative of cancer care in India

## Karunya Sparsham: Healing Without the Burden

Cancer often brings not just physical suffering but financial devastation. In response, Kerala introduced Karunya Sparsham, a zero-profit medicine distribution initiative that provides life-saving drugs at 80–90% reduced prices.

Available through Karunya outlets, these modern cancer drugs, typically unaffordable for the general population, are now within reach, an innovative solution to combat out-of-pocket expenditure that has crippled many households.

## A Pioneering Path Forward

The state's triad of early detection, decentralised treatment, and affordable medication has begun to rewrite the narrative of cancer care in India. It's about new beginnings, dignity in care, and restoring control to individuals navigating one of life's most challenging journeys. What lies ahead is a deeper commitment to research and prevention. With emerging patterns like increasing colorectal cancer incidence, Kerala's health system is staying vigilant—ready to adapt, evolve, and protect. The campaign restores hope, reduces inequity.

*The author is Deputy Director at Directorate of Health Services and State Nodal Officer of NCD*

Spreading across 125 countries and all Indian states, Pravasi chitty, takes the sweetness of the state's most trusted financial instrument, tops it with the security of KSFE and serves it right to the fingertips of all Malayalees across the globe.

## KSFE PRAVASI CHITTY

# CHITS WITHOUT BORDERS

**S K SANIL**

The Kerala State Financial Enterprises Ltd., popularly known as the KSFE is a household name in Kerala for savings through chits though it has other lines of products and financial services. KSFE, a Miscellaneous Non Banking Company (MNBC), has been operating since 1969 in the State with a view to shield the common folk from fly-by-night financial sector entities.

As everyone knows, Keralites constitute the country's major NRI Diaspora and obviously the remittances from abroad have its own substantial share. Chit being a traditional instrument which is imprinted in the minds, shall play the role of a savings instrument among the nonresident Keralites (NRK), per se. NRKs have a savings habit with an aspiration to secure and to achieve their life time goals while they are away for jobs. All these aspects put together has become the food for thought as to why not this monthly remittance instrument can be the right savings option for NRKs across the globe.

### Rise of the Pravasi Chitty

There was a landmark notification during 2015 permitting the chit foremen like KSFE to enroll NRIs under certain conditions such as the banking channels must be used for all transactions, the pay outs

or the proceeds in chits must be non-repatriable and the KYC compliance for subscribers must be ensured. In line with this the Government of Kerala has authorised KSFE to enroll NRIs in chits through issuing a suitable GO.

The first Pinarayi Government had meantime decided to tap NRI funds in a big way for making use of infrastructural projects funding by reviving the KIIFB

on account of the inadequate fund flow from divisible pool etc. The progeny is the so called Pravasi Chitty or the NRI chit, a completely tech driven savings and credit instrument. It is a right blend of Kerala's traditional chitty culture with cutting-edge technology and State-backed security. A careful approach and systematic design with a well-knit project planning from KSFE-KIIFB duo have all followed when contemplating the onerous product launch. Product positioning, streamlining the operations and aggressive marketing strategies have also been given ample attention.

It was on 18th of June 2018 that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan launched KSFE Pravasi Chitty, initially targeting the UAE and GCC countries. Then it slowly spread its wings to nations across the globe. Currently Malayalis from as many as 125 countries are beneficiaries to Pravasi Chitty. A section of the Keralites from other Indian States and UTs are also taking part in this KSFE product. The mobile application provides facilities for intending the chits in accordance with the choice of the customers. They can electronically transmit funds from their Bank accounts and can register any standing or other required instructions with regard to the operations. Furthermore, the most important peculiarity is the facility to participate in online bidding. The basic norm is the bidding for maximum discount so as to obtain the prize money in each month as far as the chit is concerned. While the domestic operations in KSFE is through auctions in offline mode, here in Pravasi Chitty it is through online mode and as such the subscribers across the globe can enter into the platform for enjoying the fruit of their respective chit.

## A Digital Bridge to Home

Pravasi Chitty operates as a fully RBI-compliant savings-cum-borrowing scheme under the Chit Fund Act 1982.

- 100% digital process from registration to chitty termination

- Click-Wrap Agreements for subscriber contracts

- Facilities for online auctions, prize money payment, deposit renewal, closure and security document submission

- Payment gateway integration with 6+ major banks for seamless installment payment

## Backing Kerala's Development

The Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) is the State Government's flagship financial institution for mobilising resources for long-term infrastructure projects. Its mission is to ensure Kerala's development through sustainable funding.

## Pravasi Chitty plays a dual role in this mission:

1. Mobilising Development Funds – The entire float fund of Pravasi Chitty is invested in KIIFB NRI Bonds, ensuring subscriber money directly fuels infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, schools and hospitals.

> Through a dedicated mobile app, users can register, make payments via integrated banking gateways, and participate in online auctions, a first-of-its-kind feature in chit history.

2. Supporting Security Requirements – The Chitty Security Deposit (CSD), a statutory requirement for starting new chitties, is also placed in KIIFB Bonds, further boosting KIIFB's resource base.

Over ₹1,000 crore worth of KIIFB Bonds have been subscribed through Pravasi Chitty to date. These investments are channeled into projects that improve connectivity, public amenities and economic growth across Kerala. Pravasi Chitty subscribers thus become indirect stakeholders in Kerala's infrastructure transformation.

## One Chitty, A World of Possibilities

- First-of-its-kind online auction platform for chitties

- Automated SMS/email alerts for installments and auctions

- Freedom to submit security documents at any KSFE branch in Kerala

- Transparent operations with full digital access to reports and accounts

Innumerable people from other states in search of better living conditions gravitate towards the state. Though Kerala fondly calls them guest workers, they are quite at home here.

# HOME FOR GUEST LABOURERS

**ARATHY K.R.**

It's half past 6 in the evening. A deserted workers' camp near Ernakulam is slowly coming to life. After a strenuous day at work, the occupants are returning 'home'. "If home is where we feel safe, secure and cared for, then this is indeed our home", says Santhosh Kumar Yadav, who hails from Bihar. He is one among over 30 lakh migrant workers from 25 states who have made Kerala their home, melting the hundreds of kilometres distance from their native land.

The evenings become livelier at these camps with the banter, phone calls and video calls to loved ones and collective cooking. "We definitely miss our family and friends back home. But our friends and colleagues here make it up with their warmth ", says Deepak from Jharkhand.

It is the warmth that Kerala as a society extended to these people that engendered an enormous migration of workers from other states in the last two decades. And the Government of Kerala institutionalised this affection with essential and consistent measures. Guest workers, as they are cordially called, have now become an integral part of Kerala's social fabric and administrative ambit. Thus, Kerala became a paragon in welcoming migrant workers and providing them with decent living and working conditions. The peaceful atmosphere, high standards of living and cordial work culture have made Kerala the favourite destination of migrant workers. Migrant workers now constitute approximately 26.6% of Kerala's workforce, according to a study published by the Times of India.

## Verifiable Identity

Every single person coming to Kerala for work is accounted for. The Home Department has developed a portal for the registration of guest workers coming to the state. Guest registration is mandatory for availing benefits under the Homeless Workers Welfare Scheme. By making registration mandatory, the details of the activities of migrant workers are readily available. This has gone a long way in ensuring law and order in the state and preventing the involvement of migrants in unlawful activities.

## Financial Inclusion

The registration in the portal helps migrant workers avail the numerous welfare schemes that the Government of Kerala provides. Apart from schemes that ensure housing, medical insurance, the government also takes care of the health, living conditions and upliftment of migrant workers. Frequent inspections are conducted in camps and corrective measures are taken. Free medical camps are also conducted for the migrant workers. The government also gives opportunities for the education of migrant workers and their children. The state government introduced a special scheme called Roshni to ensure education of children of guest workers.

## Listening to their Aawaz

Kerala is the first state to provide health insurance to migrant workers. The Aawaz Health Insurance scheme was launched by the Kerala Government in 2017 to cover the accidents and medical expenses of migrant workers. Under this scheme, individuals between 18 and 60 years can claim a sum insured of ₹25,000 to cover their medical expenses. In addition to this, accident insurance of Rs. 2 lakh and disability insurance of Rs. 1 lakh are also provided. Those who join the scheme are also eligible for maternity treatment. Migrant workers registered in the scheme get an Aadhaar-style identity card with a unified identification number and QR code.

## Advice and Assistance

Shramik Bandhu Facilitation Centres have been started in all districts to implement the Aawaz scheme to ensure the health care and registration of guest workers. The services of facilitators proficient in various

**Training has been provided in smart phone usage, internet navigation and online access to government services.**

regional languages have been made available in these centres. These centres provide guest workers with the necessary advice and assistance on various issues such as employment, banking, health, and accident financial assistance through the facilitation centres.

## Ensuring Housing

The government has made many arrangements for the accommodation of guest workers. The 'Alay' project provides guest workers with a rented building with a floor area of 6.5 square meters and improved facilities. The portal and app allows building owners to upload details of their buildings, and guest tenants can access this portal and select buildings that are suitable for them.

The government's determination to ensure affordable, clean and safe hostel accommodation for migrant workers resulted in the inception of the Apna Ghar scheme. These hostels provide safe, hygienic and affordable rented accommodation in the form of hostels to migrant workers. They have shared rooms, multiple kitchens, mess areas, bathrooms, toilets, recreational facilities, etc. Sewage treatment plant, rainwater harvesting, diesel generator backup, and CCTV systems are also available here. "I feel so gratified because I get good salary here and also get neat and decent accomodation facilities", says Krishnakumar Yadav, a resident of Apna Ghar at Kanchikkode, Palakkad.

The first Apnaghar in the state was established at Kanchikode. The 520-bed Apna Ghar hostel, spread over one acre of land in three blocks within the K.S.I.D.C. Industrial Growth Centre in Kinalur, Kozhikode is home to thousands of workers. The Apnaghar project in Ernakulam is coming up on an acre of land with 534 plots within the B.F.K. Kalamassery Kinfra Hi-Tech Park in Ernakulam.

"I embarked on the journey to Kerala with a lot of hope and I am proud to say that I am indeed very happy here." These words of Rohit Kumar who works in Palakkad reiterate the receptivity and hospitality of Kerala. And the state has made good use of the influx of migrant workers in its economic development.

Kadamakkudy has become a point of discussion with industrial titan Anand Mahindra praising the beautiful island in 'X' (Twitter) and saying that he is scheduled to visit the spot in December. Once isolated and difficult to reach, the transformation of the Kadamakkudy islands, a breathtaking archipelago nestled amidst the waters of Vembanad Lake near Kochi, is tremendous.

# THE RUSTIC PARADISE CONNECTS BY WATER METRO

**A.T. REMYA**

Kadamakkudy has become a point of discussion with industrial titan Anand Mahindra praised the beautiful island in 'X' (Twitter) that he is scheduled to visit the spot in December. Once isolated and difficult to reach, the transformation of the Kadamakkudy islands, a breathtaking archipelago nestled amidst the waters of Vembanad Lake near Kochi, are now experiencing a new dawn. With the arrival of essential infrastructure like roads and bridges, the journey to Kadamakkudy is no longer a struggle. The upcoming Water Metro is set to solve the remaining travel challenges, paving the way for a new era of connectivity.
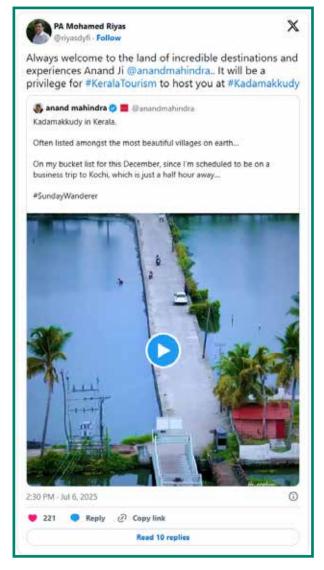
## A Cluster of 14 Islands

Kadamakkudy is not a single island but a community of fourteen smaller islands, including Valiya Kadamakkudy, Murikkal, Palayam Thuruthu, Pizhala, Cheriya Kadamakkudy, Pulikkappuram, Moolampilly, Puthusseri, Chariyam Thuruthu, Chennoor, Kothad, Korambadam, and Kandanaad. This stunning archipelago is a natural masterpiece, strategically positioned amidst a bustling commercial city. Historically, people from these islands, surrounded by water, relied on boats and small canoes for contact with the outside world. The recent development of roads and bridges has drastically changed this reality. The Water Metro, however, promises to open up new opportunities for development and tourism.

## A Rich History and an Intriguing Name

The origins of the Kadamakkudy islands are believed to trace back to the great flood of the 13th century, which is said to have caused the Periyar River to change its course, leading to the formation of these islands. The name "Kadamakkudy" itself is steeped in local folklore. One popular theory suggests it originated from kadal mukkuvan (sea

fishermen) and kudi vechu (settled), referring to a place where sea fishermen made their homes. Another story posits that the name came from the area's abundant supply of kallu (toddy). A third theory, reflecting the islands' previous isolation, suggests the name is a shortened form of "Kadannal Kudungi," which means "trapped if you enter."





## Water Metro: A New Lifeline

The Water Metro project, which is part of the Vypin constituency's development plan, includes 14 terminals. The construction of the terminals at Kadamakkudy and Paliyamthuruthu is now in its final phase. With the procurement of boats and other associated work, both terminals are expected to become operational by the end of this year. The Water Metro, which officially launched on April 25, 2023, is already running services with 19 boats has been well-received for its unique, comfortable, and eco-friendly travel experience, addressing current and future transportation needs at an affordable cost.

## A Tourist's Delight: Nature, Food, and Serenity

Kadamakkudy's serene beauty attracts a steady stream of domestic and international tourists. Visitors come to enjoy the scenic backwaters, savour delicious local seafood—including crabs, prawns, and freshwater fish—and engage in birdwatching. A boat journey through the backwaters is a feast for the eyes, offering glimpses of migratory birds, vast pokkali rice fields, and local fishermen at work. The rural landscapes and breathtaking sunrises and sunsets provide endless photo opportunities. The Water Metro will undoubtedly enhance this experience, offering tourists a novel and comfortable way to explore the islands.

Development efforts in Kadamakkudy have been focused on preserving the island's natural charm while providing modern amenities. The Water Metro is a monumental step forward.

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# KUDUMBASHREE BECOMES PREMIUM

Following the success of Janakeeya hotels which served homely food at affordable rates, Kudumbashree has entered the premium restaurant market with its signature panache. With Cafe Premium Restaurant Chain, Kudumbashree aimed to start high-quality restaurants that stand out from the existing restaurants. 11 high-quality Cafe Premium Restaurants have started operations.

Cafes have been started in a total of 11 districts including Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam (Panmana), Pathanamthitta (Panthalam), Kottayam (Kuravilangad), Ernakulam (Angamaly), Thrissur (Guruvayur), Malappuram, Kannur, Kozhikode (Koyilandy), Wayanad (Meppadi) and Kasaragod and are operating successfully.



The menu at these cafes is a carefully curated celebration of traditional recipes and diverse flavours, bringing the authentic essence of Kerala's food culture.

This endeavour opens up enhanced business prospects and skill development that goes a long way in empowering women. These cafes ensure that entrepreneurs in the catering sector get sustainable income, while guaranteeing professional and branded services to the customers.

Kudumbashree members are in total control handling cooking, food distribution, billing, cleaning and parcel services in premium cafe restaurants. Thus, they are gaining the capability to lead the operation of premium-level business ventures. Each member undergoes extensive training, ensuring commitment to excellent service.

# KSRTC EXPO

Life can take you High than Drugs

NO TO DRUGS