The importance of women to the economic development of India was first recognized during the country’s struggle for independence. Empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organization and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community. The formation of Self-Help-Groups will enhance their socio-economic position in the society. It is women who run the household; a higher standard of living for women ensures better governance and a healthier and more prosperous future for the children and a better future for the nation. Historically Kerala has been quite different from the rest of the country as far as status of women is concerned. Due to progressive social movements, matched by proper State action, Kerala has had very high indicator of women development.

Women empowerment initiatives, micro-finance operations, micro enterprise promotion and convergent community action constitute the core activities of Kudumbasree, carried out through organizations of women below the poverty line. Kudumbasree has contributed to enhancing the social capital of the poor, which in turn has served as a basis for economic development. Kudumbasree promotes self-respect, social status and sense of unity among the members. It organizes the poor in such an inclusive and dynamic fashion and invests the organization with such a range of responsibilities, powers and activities.

Kudumbasree is helpful in improving the knowledge about benefits and services, enhancing the capacity to access guaranteed entitlements, social and economic security through self-help expanding control over resources meant for the poor, strengthening demand for improvement in services and gradually moving on to a public action. It acted as a ‘launch
vehicle’ for the developmental activities of various government departments.

The present study entitled “Role of Kudumbasree in Waste Management- A Study of Ernakulam District” is an attempt to bring about the role played by Kudumbasree members in the waste management programmes of the district and at the same time how it acted as a source of livelihood to them. The study is organized in seven chapters and is based on both primary and secondary data. ‘207’ Kudumbasree members engaged in waste management in the study area formed the sample for primary data. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, magazines, periodicals, newspapers and websites. Statistical techniques like averages, percentages, chi-square tests, sample proportion test, cross tabulation techniques were used to analyze the data and diagrams like bar diagram, pie diagram and Venn diagram were used to present the data.

Urbanization and industrialization lead to pollution and other ecological problems in the urban areas. Environmental pollution and waste discharge acted as major obstacles to sustainable development. Thus solid waste management has become a serious issue for the urban and semi urban areas of Kerala. The study has identified that majority of the Kudumbasree members engaged in waste management were middle aged women and the younger generation are not interested in this programme. The study found that all workers wear uniform for their identity. Majority of them were not taking all the precautions and safety equipment while at work. The studies also found that local bodies hardly care about the health of these workers and were not providing training to them. Before coming into waste management these workers were engaged into several other jobs and the income was very meagre. The study shows that after joining Kudumbasree all members became earning members and their income increased. Half of the total population used their income for meeting household expenses. The
study found that, more remuneration, less education and a job of permanent income prompted the Kudumbasree members to select this job.

On the basis of the study suggestions were made to improve the working conditions of the Kudumbasree members. Local bodies must provide safety equipment and training programmes to these workers. Besides this, the authorities must take necessary arrangements for waste segregation. By including waste management in school curriculum as a compulsory topic, awareness about it can be created among the children. It is suggested that a union is necessary to meet the demands of the workers. The study also throws light on the services of ‘other state workers’ and the role played by various residents associations in making this programme successful in the district.