The overall development of a nation depends to a great extent, on the inclusion of women in the entire nation building process. Unfortunately woman rarely enjoys the wide spectrum of freedom in her life because of the ‘subordination’ imposed her by a mail dominated society. This naturally hinders her decision making capacity leading to a state of disempowerment, reflected not only in her own life, but also in the family where she has a pivotal role in moulding the children – the next generation – as well as the judicious management of the family budget even though they are not at all recognized and accounted by anybody. The late recognition of the above facts by the government and policy makers lead to the creation of the concept of women empowerment. Women empowerment is a process where women recognize their rights and freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and Law (Judiciary system) which enable them to become ‘demanders’ rather than ‘beneficiaries’ of various schemes and programmes designed by the authorities for the development/ welfare of women.

In our country, for the well-being and the empowerment of women, different schemes and models are practiced producing mixed results. In Kerala, an innovative model of women empowerment, focusing the empowerment of women at grass root level is implemented through Local Self Government Bodies (LSGBs) with the collaboration of NABARD in the year 1999 and has its operations in each and every district in the state. The present study is conducted in Ernakulam district to assess the empowerment attained by the women through their involvement in kudumbashree activities there by to judge their financial/ economic independence, social responsiveness and political vibrancy. Both primary as
well as secondary data were used for the study. Multi stage random sampling technique was followed for the selection of the sample. Primary data collected from 300 groups and 600 members constitute the base for the measurement of empowerment. The quality as well as the functioning of the groups is studied to examine whether the groups provide sufficient space to the members for empowerment. The empowerment of the individual member is measured by noticing the changes in the economic/financial, social and political lives of the members by giving score values to the selected indicators. The collected data is processed and analyzed using SPSS package. The results of the study revealed that kudumbashree Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) provide adequate space to its members for empowerment, though NHGs in the rural areas are comparatively in a better position than that of the urban. The individual empowerment of the members depends not on the type/ nature of the NHGs, rather on the wise exploitation of the opportunities provided by the group. The constraints expressed by them reveal the need and urgency of the evaluation of the programmes. Moreover, the women are empowered enough to give new dimension to ‘women empowerment’.