PREFACE

As a girl growing up in a patriarchal society, I was aware of the different problems faced by girls and women around me. Later, when I started my research on gender issues, I must admit that a lot of my initial opinions formed entirely by listening to, reading about, or witnessing atrocities around me had to be changed. The whole perspective of feminism and fight for gender equality often appeared to be a one-sided argument. The realisation that men too faced problems in a system apparently promoting their interests was a big revelation. Also, it was difficult to ignore the fact that in many cases of cruelty and exploitation towards women, the culprits were not an all men group, there were women accomplices too. Since society comprises both genders, real equality happens only when there is mutual acceptance, understanding and cooperation amongst each other. Hence, I decided to do this study on Gender Mainstreaming.

The goal of mainstreaming gender equality is the transformation of unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both men and women. It means bringing the experience, knowledge, and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda. Gender mainstreaming is an essential strategy not only for attaining gender equality, but also for the sustainable development of societies as a whole.

The first step to implement any action in society is to make them aware of the need for such an act. Sensitisation of the society is the need of the hour, without which no programmes on gender mainstreaming can be successfully implemented. Many organisations – governmental, NGOs, women’s, religious, social – are already working to this end. My religious identity gave
me a firsthand experience of the life guidance courses offered by the Catholic Church for its followers at each stage of their life. The talks and discussions led to an understanding of the social sensitisation activities undertaken by the Church and organisations run by them.

One such organisation bringing about social as well as individual transformation in a positive manner in Kerala is the Diocesan Social Service Society (DSSS). Each DSSS has chosen their core areas of functioning based on the requirements of that region, lifestyles and vocation of the people in the area. The benefits of their work are not restricted to followers of the Catholic Church alone. It transcends the whole society. The change their work brought in to the attitudes of individuals and society is remarkable. Getting to know more about their activities and interacting with them was so inspiring that I chose their activities and its outcome as my thesis topic. The study has not only helped me with the pursuit of academics, but also left in me a deep impression of people who rose above adverse circumstances that they became a source of inspiration for my own personal goals. I hope more people get involved in such gender mainstreaming activities and our generation is able to witness a sea change in the existing social structure.

The current study focuses on the activities and achievements of various DSSS across the state. The study leads through assessing them within the parameters of gender mainstreaming as defined by the UN Economic and Social Council and then examines their role, present and projected, in social transformation and sustainable development in Kerala.

The construct of this report is designed in progression supplemented with the systematic study inputs and observations. The first chapter details the background and context of the problem. The conceptual and theoretical
explanation of the key elements validating the rationale of the study is also done in this chapter. The second chapter reviews the empirical literature focussing the major themes of the current study as covered in specific studies, reports and intervention programmes. The third chapter details the approach, methodology and the organisation of the research process. The fourth chapter analyses the primary data collected through the interviews and comes up with results thus forming the quantitative part of the study. The fifth chapter looks into the focus group discussions for the observations and reflections based on the case studies thus adding up the qualitative part of the study. The sixth chapter connects the results and inferences of the quantitative and qualitative information. The seventh chapter presents the findings, leading to the conclusions and observations, followed by theoretical implications, and policy and programme recommendations.

Jolly K. James