

# Women, Water & Well-Being: A Case Study of ‘Kuttadampadam’ in Palakkad, Kerala

OPEN ACCESS

**V.Shinju**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Vimala College, Thrissur, Kerala, India*

Volume: 7

**Aswathi Prasad**

*Christ University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India*

Issue: 1

Month: July

Year: 2019

ISSN: 2321-788X

Received: 31.05.2019

Accepted: 27.06.2019

Published: 01.07.2019

Citation:

Shinju, V., and Aswathi Prasad. “Women, Water & Well-Being: A Case Study of ‘Kuttadampadam’ in Palakkad, Kerala.” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2019, pp. 44-49.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v7i1.534>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

## Abstract

*The natural resources are repository for the survival of all of us, so they must be used efficiently to meet the present needs while conserving them for future generations. An action to develop capacities from global to household levels for their sustainable management and regulation is required henceforth. Of these natural resources, water resources are most precious. If there is no water; there would be no life on earth. Since ‘water is the elixir of life’, water resource management has been considered as one of the most relevant areas of intervention. Understanding the gender dimensions of water resource management is a starting point for reversing the degradation of water resources. Women play an important role here since they have to access the water resources for almost all the activities on a daily basis. As the women are the strong social agents, effective and improved water preservation techniques could be achieved through their empowerment that may eventually lead to the well-being of the households in particular and of the community in general. Therefore, the major research question posed in this study is to analyze the role of women in the preservation and management of water, an inevitable, precious but diminishing natural resource. The study also intends to describe the relationship between the three ‘W’s- Women, Water & Well-being. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are essential here as it is a contingent issue in the present scenario. Psychological dimensions were also explored since the issue is affecting the routine life of the community. The case study of women belonging to the Kuttadampadam region was done to explain the role of women in preserving water resources in the areas affecting severe water scarcity.*

**Keywords:** Women, Water, Well-being, Water preservation, Water resource management

## Introduction

Water- “The elixir of life” is considered to be just like a philosopher’s stone in the hands of an alchemist in history. Water is essential to all lives on the planet. As per the ‘Environmental Fact sheet’ of the water resources on earth released by New Hampshire, only three percent of the water is fresh and two-thirds of the fresh water is locked up in ice caps and glaciers. At present, only 0.08 percent of the world’s fresh water is exploited by mankind in the context of ever increasing sanitation, drinking, leisure, agriculture, and other purposes. Water resource management is the activity of planning, developing, distributing and managing the optimum use of water resources. It is a sub-set of water-cycle management. Ideally, water resource management and planning has been regarded as superior to all the competing demands for water on an equitable basis to satisfy all uses and demands. For water, this is particularly difficult and a matter of deep concern; since successful management of any resource requires accurate knowledge of the resources available, the uses of it, the competing demands for the resources, the measures and the processes to evaluate the significance of the practice in resource management.

It is also inevitable to ensure the sustainability of the current and even future water resource allocation, to have better earth with adequate water resources. Anyhow the field of water resource management will have to continue to adapt to the current and future prospects.

Incorporating the gender dimensions in water resource management is of global attention and practice in the current scenario. The Report of the Committee on 'Economic, Social & Cultural Rights, Geneva-November, 2012'-highlights the work, efforts, and skills that women put into the management and the judicious use of essential water resources. Managing water in an integrated and sustainable way can actually improve gender equity by easy access, both to water and it's related services (UNDP, 2002). Experiences around the world have shown that moving in this direction calls for mainstreaming gender and well-being to them. As strong 'social agents' women play a vital role in the effective management of water resources and thereby reducing the degradation of water resources. The role of women in water conservation and their empowerment may hopefully lead to the well-being and all members in society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since only 0.08 percent of the total amount of water in the world is fresh water and the need for water have been increasing day by day in an alarming way that 'If a third world war occurs, it will be for the water', water resource management and preservation of water resources calls for an immediate attention. Water resource management in an integrated and sustainable way can actually improve gender equity by access, both to water and to related services (UNDP, 2002). Nowadays women are proving themselves to be strong advocates for the water agenda and management. The theoretical framework of Dublin Principle-32 formulated in 1992 on "Women and Water management: an Integrated Approach" implies that women play a central part on the provision, management, and safeguarding of water. Several case studies belonging to different countries of the world was put forward to highlight the same. It stresses the development issues confronted by the environment and the water

resources in particular contexts. The role of women in water resource management is neither limited nor static. It is to be addressed in such a way that it brings prosperity and well-being in society.

Since women and water are related in many ways, an integrated approach towards it could bring enlightening prospectus for water resource management. The role of women in water conservation and management should be explored in such a way that it proposes a question of challenge for the society to rise for the same just from the household level to the community level. From time to time, several practices and measures were adopted by women to deal with water shortage and scarcity. An analysis of such practices and their evaluation could expand the existing knowledge this field especially in micro settings. Thus the problems of water resource management thus should be addressed from the level of women, with deep concerns for a sustainable environment in mind. This study is an attempt to explore the role of women in water conservation and water resource management at "Kuttadampadam" belonging to Palakkad district in Kerala. Since the area is a tropical hilly one, water scarcity is severe due to various factors. The area is prone to acute water shortage and contradictory needs with the available sources of water. Understanding the gender dimensions by citing the role played by women in water resource management and its preservation could bring significant insights to understand the situation. Like any other natural resources the water resources are very precious aspects that hold and sustain life on earth. Therefore, water resource management has a pivotal place in the agenda of the current and future prospects of a sustainable environment. Hence the study poses a major research question, "What is the role played by women in the preservation of water resources and the management of water; an inevitable, precious but diminishing natural resource?" The study also attempts to explain the relationship between the '3Ws'- "Women, Water and Well-being" through a case study of the "Kuttadampadam" at Palakkad district in Kerala. In this context, the main objective of the study is "to understand the role played by women in the preservation of water sources and the management of water"

## Methods and Data

Epistemologically a “Mixed method” approach has been adopted for the study. Initially quantitative approach was adopted for the study. The sociological significance of the study demands a more subject or actor oriented exploration hence the research adopted a qualitative method based on its ontological stand position. Case study method was employed primarily followed by a focused-group discussion. A Multi-stage sampling technique was applied for the identification of the area of study. Since Kerala has been experiencing the increasing incidence of extreme water scarcity in the recent past, a systematic selection of the area can provide better a contextual explanation.

In the first stage of sampling, three regions were identified- northern, southern and central. In the second level, the central region was selected and categorized on the basis of district boundaries and from this region, Palakkad district was chosen for the study where acute water shortage is visible. In the third stage of sampling, different water-scarce areas in Palakkad district were identified. In the next level” Kuttadamapadam” area belonging to Ongallur Grama Panchayath in the district was selected for the study, as the region has shown a clear history of water scarcity and demands the immediate attention for better water resource management and preservation. A Pilot Study was conducted in the area with a Focused group interview amongst two groups-a general group and a women group. After realizing the relevance and scope of the issue through pilot study, the actual data collection was conducted in a period of two months (during the months of October and November 2015). In the process of data collection, both qualitative and quantitative aspects were incorporated for getting an in-depth insight into the problem. A semi-structured interview schedule has been administered among the respondents at first, for collecting the basic socio-economic profile of the selected women. Ethnographic field notes were also taken for a better understanding of the intensity and different dimensions of the problem as a requirement for an explorative study. The narratives of the respondents were coded, connected and embedded based on the major objectives. The numerical inferences obtained from the quantitative

analysis were corroborated with the ethnographic filed notes to get reliable results.

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of the Area

The area of the current study is “Kuttadampadam” which located on both sides of the Pookkottur road of ward IX at Ongallur Grama Panchayath situated in the central region of Palakkad district in Kerala state. It is a hilly area with fertile soil but chances for soil erosion are high here. The area covers within 1000 square meters consisting of 23 households with 350 members. Between 15-20 wells and one pond are there in the area and no other water resources are found. The area consists of people with agrarian and domestic work to a large extent. The average Household size in the area is 5.105 persons which shows that available water is not enough to meet the daily needs (In Kerala context, normal average HH size is 4.7 persons).

### Water Availability and the Role of Women

In this area, water is considered to be the most valuable resource all the time. Most of the households use water for cleaning and domestic purposes at a higher amount per day that show their care in health, sanitation and keeping the surroundings clean. A few of them use water primarily for cooking, drinking, and other domestic or agrarian purposes. Water availability in the area is not sufficient and some households could not even meet the daily needs properly. As there exists limitations in water availability due to the shortage of rainfall, the topography of the region, destruction of water resources, absence of sufficient water preservation mechanisms, etc.; the usage practices are showing a different facet in this regard. In the households especially women have started to introduce the 3R principle, “Reduce. Re-use and Recycle” in the water usage practices to meet their daily needs.

It is found that a grave mismatch between the need and availability of water and its resources in this area that prove the shortage of water supply. While analyzing, it could be found that in the case of a household with 7 members, whose need is 1000 liters and the availability is 700 liters of water per day, there occurs a shortage of 300 liters that affect the per capita availability of 142.85 liters for a day.

Women in this area are facing acute water scarcity hence they have adopted some measures to cope up with the circumstances. Households are depending more on public water supply and they seem to be deprived of own water resources. They also collect water from wells and continue it to satisfy their daily needs. A clean history of water scarcity could be found in the area. Remarkable changes occurred in the availability of water from the same sources of water through the concerted efforts initiated by women.

### **Problems due to Water Scarcity**

Due to the shortage of rainfall, the topography of the region, destruction of water resources, absence of sufficient water preservation mechanisms, etc.; there occur a clear gap between the needs and availability of water that led to water scarcity. Severe physical strain has to be taken by the women to collect and transport water from a distant water source. As the area seems to be a typical non- water contingent area in summer, various problems occur in the familial, interpersonal relations, health, and sanitation. Wastage of time and inability to concentrate on occupation or job properly and the non-involvement in other recreational activities due to this prospect also affect the well-being of women. While coming up with a psychological paradigm, it is also found that scarcity of water and associated problems cause psychological disturbances to women. When an inadequate availability of water happens in life, women are confronted with severe mental pressure and disturbances. Depression seems to be a commonly occurring state of being among them due to problematic water sources. On the whole, all these households – irrespective of any variation in age, education, occupation, caste and household size- have to face various socio-psychological disturbances due to the problem of water scarcity to a great extent in their lives.

### **Women and water Resource Management**

For women, water is just like oxygen, even for the one-tenth of a minute they could not live without thinking about water. They feel safe and secure when there is adequate availability of water and they could practice better water resource management and preservation strategies. Many of the respondents

said that they feel confidence and get pleasure when the means for water preservation adopted by them become successful and thereby it contributes to the psychological well-being of everyone the household as well as the community in all dimensions. In the area of study, all the respondents irrespective of their socio-economic background are aware of the need for water conservation and preservation of water resources.

### **Best Practices for Water Preservation by Women**

In order to solve various problems caused due to water scarcity and shortage, the women eventually find out some solutions by them as well as started to adopt the widely accepted, generalized means of water preservation including self-initiated “reduce and re-use” strategies, installation of ‘Jalasambharani’, participation in the ‘Jalanidhi project’, and well re-charging. In the area of study, all of the respondents irrespective of their profile regulate the usage of water in their daily life situations and it shows their increased concern for water conservation and they ensure the maximum utilization of water they collect each day and few of them also store the water for the next day by using only a portion of it. Some of these women also have a system of practicing the ‘re-use’ of water while others are consuming the entire water fully at a time only for single purpose. Some of them also adopt measures of their own to reduce water used daily. From this, it could be understood that the women use a “3 -R” Strategy for water resource management consciously or unconsciously in their daily routine. The concern for water resource management could also be found in their interest for rain water harvesting. Many of them have installed a ‘mazhavella sambharani’ in their households. But limitations in the infrastructure of the household and the availability of land are obstacles for some women who need to install such a system on a large scale.

Being women as the strong social agents and the first agent of socialization, they could bring wonders in constructing concerns and sensitivity among the present society and also in the future generation. In the area of study, from time to time, the women have developed a habit of giving instructions to the children in an appropriate use of water by reducing the wastage. They disseminate

the relevant information to children and provide updates for preserving the same water sources and the management and conservation of water. They also exchange information with their neighbors and others regarding the need for water conservation and measures to preserve water resources. They constantly remind others regarding the need for water conservation and water resource management, on a daily routine. They are also interested in practicing collective measures for water conservation. They are also interested in participating in awareness programs or campaigns organized for the preservation of water resources.

### Major Findings

In the area of study, there is an explicit but serious gap between the need and availability of water sources that cause acute water shortage and scarcity. The problem of water scarcity leads to various socio-psychological, economic and cultural problems with various dimensions, thus affecting both the individuals and the households. A psychological paradigm is also there in the issue of water scarcity. Various strategies and practices are adopted by the women to tackle the problem and ensure better water resource management and several 'best-practices' seen among them could be a role model for others. Educated, employed, young-middle aged women, particularly belonging to 21-50 years of age are better aware, concerned, and equipped with various measures and strategies of better water resource management. The usage of "3-R" principle, maximum utilization of water resources, Rain water harvesting techniques, socialization of others, etc. could be found as the best practices among these women for the preservation of water preservation. Majority of the women perceived themselves, "as women, they have played major role in the preservation of water resources and water resource management", thereby proving that they are the true environmentalists or the real ecological ambassadors in the society.

### Summary and Conclusion

One of the biggest concerns for our water-based resources is the sustainability of them for the present and future generations. Women play a vital

role here, proving themselves to be strong social agents and advocates for the sustainability of the environment. From the sociological exploration of the Kuttadampadam region, it is clear that the women here prove to be true environmentalists or ecological ambassadors as they render potential services for effective water resource management. As women being the strong social agents and 'mother' being the first agent of socialization, they could mould a generation with pro-environmentalism. The works, skills, and efforts of women for the same should be identified on local as well as global levels for the well-being of the earth. Strong motivation, recognition, and support should be rendered to all these women by family, society and government; policies and programme must be initiated to empower them economically, technically, culturally, socially, politically, psychologically and spiritually.

### Limitations of the Study

Since a case study approach was followed, generalization of the results is not possible due to limited representativeness. Subjective bias, errors of memory and judgment could also have confronted the results of the study. Limited availability of time and other logistics should also be taken into consideration.

### References

- "Women's Role in Water and Sanitation Addressed." *American Water Works Association*, vol. 86, no. 11, 1994, P. 107.
- Bhatt, MR. "Women in Water Management: The Need for Local Planning." *Oxfam GB*, vol. 5 no. 3, 1995, pp. 254-258.
- Bermer, A. "Breast feeding and women's health." *Journal of Women's Health*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1998.
- Culp, GL., Culp, RL, & Hamann, CL. "Water Resource Preservation by Planned Recycling of Treated Wastewater." *American Water Works Association*, vol. 65, no. 10, 2016, pp. 641-647.
- Danielson, SS. (1992). *Healing Women's Wrongs: Water-Cure as (Fictional) Autobiography*. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30227629>



- Davis, MH. "Women and Water: Making Waves in the Industry." *Journal of American Water Works*, vol. 98, no. 3, 2006. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41314577>
- Hemson, D. "Accelerated Delivery? Rural Women and Water." *Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, vol. 45, 2000, pp. 54–65. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066317>
- Hemson, D. "Women Are Weak When They Are Amongst Men Women's Participation in Rural Water Committees in South Africa." *Empowering Women for Gender Equity*. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066469>
- Kaur, S., Nieuwenhuijsen, M.J., Ferrier, H, & Steer, P. (2004). Exposure of Pregnant Women to Tap Water Related Activities. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27732254>
- Leite, M.(2010). After the summit: women's access to water and policymaking in Brazil. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25758881>
- Levien, M. "Narmada and myth of Rehabilitation." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 33, 2006, pp. 3581-3585.
- Naguib, N. "Women, Water and Memory: Recasting Lives in Palestine." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/mew.2009.5.3.190>
- Nihila A, KS. "Water Poverty Index Mapping and GIS based Approach for Identifying Potential Water Harvesting Sites." *International Journal of Remote Science and Geo-Science*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2012.
- Rutkoviene, V, and Cesoniene, L, "Environment-Friendly Farming as a Pathway to Water Quality Protection." *Proceedings of the V.Alpsdria Scientific Workshop*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2006, pp. 73-76. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23788897>
- Sharpe, WE. "Why Consider Water Conservation?." *Journal of American Water Works Association*, vol. 70, no. 9, 1978, pp. 475-479. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41269492>

### Author Details

**Dr.V.Shinju**, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Vimala College, Thrissur, Kerala, India.

**Email ID:** [shinjuv@hotmail.com](mailto:shinjuv@hotmail.com).

**Aswathi Prasad**, Christ University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.