
A DUAL APPROACH TO EMPOWERMENT: COMPARING KUDUMBASHREE'S JANAKEYYA HOTEL AND PREMIUM CAFE

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of Kudumbashree's prominent initiatives - Janakeeya hotel and Premium café highlighting their distinct approaches to community empowerment and economic development. Janakeeya hotel established during the COVID-19 pandemic, are grassroots community driven enterprises that provide affordable, nutritious meals to marginalized populations, emphasizing social welfare and food security through women-managed micro-enterprises. In contrast, Premium cafes represent Kudumbashree's venture into upscale dining, targeting affluent consumers and tourists with modern infrastructure, diverse menus, and high-quality service, thereby fostering women entrepreneurs' professionalism and urban economic growth. While Janakeeya hotels prioritize inclusivity and sustainability, Premium cafe focus on branding, innovation and expanding market reach. Both models demonstrate Kudumbashree's holistic approach to empowerment – balancing social safety, entrepreneurial ambition, and community resilience – each contributing uniquely to Kerala's socio economic fabric and showcasing the versatility of women – led community initiatives. This study employs Secondary data from official government records, Kudumbashree mission reports and peer-reviewed academic literature pertaining to the period of 2024-2025.

Keywords: Kudumbashree, Janakeeya hotel, Premium Cafe, Women empowerment, Food service units,

Introduction

Food service industry has had immense changes over the years. The food service industry is one of the fastest growing industries in India. In Kerala migrant population has increased the opportunities restaurants and expanded their business. Globalization is a reason for innovation of new dishes. People have started to prefer other cuisines over traditional Kerala cuisines but families prefer traditional food (Sujith A S & John A, 2019). The food service industry in Kerala has witnessed a fascinating evolution, with diverse models catering to different segments of society. In Kerala 9044 food outlets have been launched in this financial year, covering the period from April 1, 2024 to March 16, 2025. These outlets include fast food centers, biriyani – mandi restaurants, traditional eateries, cafes and snack shops, attracting an investment of Rs.587crore And generating employment for 26,266 people. This figure represents the total growth of the food service sector across Kerala. Among these, Janakeeya hotels and Premium cafes stand out as two contrasting yet impactful initiatives of Kudumbashree.

The Kudumbashree mission launched on 17th May 1998, Kerala's flagship poverty eradication and women empowerment programme, has been a beacon of hope for countless women across the state and is globally recognized as a pioneering model of women – led community development (S Kadiyala, 2004). Kudumbashree serves as vital mechanism for promoting women empowerment (Williams G et.al., 2011). Kudumbashree mission proved that women empowerment is the final solution for poverty eradication. Kudumbashree empowers women through awareness class and leadership training. The concept of participatory development and empowerment adopted by the mission ensured sustainable livelihood to lakhs of poor families in the state (Chirayath Susan & Chirayath Deepa, 2010). Kudumbashree offers training programs and partial financial and marketing support to existing and new-micro-enterprise units (Varghese D & Ranganathan S ,2022). Kudumbashree run restaurant and handicraft production employee many directly in tourism and there are numerous enterprises that financially benefits from the presence of tourists. (Megarry, K, 2008). Among its many initiatives, Janakeeya hotels and Premium cafes stand out for their contributions to the food service sector, catering to two contrasting audience segments. This article explores the objectives, operational models and providing comparative analysis of their roles in community empowerment and economic development.

Janakeeya Hotels: A Model of Grassroots Empowerment

The Janakeeya hotel, born out of the “Hunger – Free Kerala” programme, is a community –driven initiative aimed at providing affordable meals to the underprivileged. Established during the COVID – 19 pandemic as community kitchen by former finance minister T.M Thomas Issac and later renamed as Janakeeya hotel. Janakeeya hotels emerged as a lifeline for many, offering meals at

subsidized rates. With prices as low as Rs. 20 per meal, the Janakeeya hotels ensure that no one goes hungry, irrespective of their financial status. Operating on a micro – enterprise model, these hotels are managed by Kudumbashree women entrepreneurs. Beyond addressing food insecurity, the initiative has created a sustainable livelihood for thousands of women. The focus on hygiene, quality and affordability has made Janakeeya hotels a trusted name in community dining. Moreover, the grading system introduced to evaluate these hotels has further enhanced their standards, ensuring consistent quality and service.

Number of Janakeeya Hotels: 723 (data as on 01/11/2025)

Operational Model: managed by Kudumbashree women’s groups, to ensure affordability meals priced at 20 per meal now increased to 30 due to rising prices of essential commodities, cooking gas as well as subsidy arrears and subsidy withdrawals. Offers simplified menus featuring nutritious traditional dishes.

Social Impact: provides stable income for women, promotes food security and inclusivity and focuses on local produce and minimal wastage.

Key Features of Janakeeya Hotels

- **Affordability:** meals are subsidized, making them accessible to the underprivileged.
- **Community involvement:** operated by women from Kudumbashree units, these hotels empower women economically and socially.
- **Sustainability:** emphasis on local produce and eco – friendly practices aligns with sustainable development goals.

Socio – economic Contributions:

- Directly addresses hunger and malnutrition in marginalized communities
- Strengthens community bonds through collective efforts

Objectives

- To ensure food security and nutritional support
- Empower women through livelihood opportunities
- Promote social inclusion and welfare
- Support’s Government’s hunger – free Kerala initiative
- Encourage local economy and self - reliance

Challenges Faced:

- Limited financial sustainability due to subsidized pricing
- Dependency on government and community support

- Withdrawal of subsidy (after price revision)
- Customer footfall due to price revision

Premium Cafes: Elevating the Culinary Experience

In contrast to the grassroots approach of the Janakeeya hotel, the Premium cafe represents Kudumbashree's foray into upscale dining segments. Launched as "Café Kudumbashree Premium Restaurants" on 27 January 2024 at Angamaly, Ernakulam, and inaugurated by M.B Rajesh, (Minister Local Self Government Department and Excise Department, Government of Kerala). Premium cafe aims to showcase the culinary expertise of Kudumbashree entrepreneurs while catering to a more affluent clientele. It extends high quality services in all areas like parking, cleanliness, waste management, parcel service and online services.

The Premium cafes offer a curated menu featuring signature dishes that highlight Kerala's rich culinary heritage with a focus on ambiance, cleanliness and high – quality service, these cafes provide a premium dining experience. They also serve as a platform for Kudumbashree women demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills in a competitive market, breaking stereotypes and setting new benchmarks for women – enterprises.

Number of Premium Cafe: 14(data as on 01/11/2025)

Inception and Vision: designed to bridge the gap between community – driven initiatives and professional food service sector, Premium cafes are Kudumbashree's attempt to target urban, affluent and tourist demographics.

Operational Dynamics: professional branding and modern infrastructure, diverse menus, including Kerala cuisines and international dishes, located at strategic points such as highways and tourist hubs.

Broader Impacts: offers specialized training for women and generates higher revenues compared to Janakeeya hotels.

Financial Risks: Premium cafe offers significant opportunities for economic growth and brand elevation; it carries financial risks also. The high overhead cost associated with modern infrastructure, professional branding and specialized staff training place considerable pressure on revenue generation, particularly during the initial phases of operation (Mun & Jang, 2018 Unlike the Janakeeya hotels, which benefit from government subsidies and community-level support structures, Premium cafes operate closer to the commercial market and more vulnerable to fluctuations in consumer spending.

Socio – economic Contributions

- Boosts Kerala's economy by creating employment and revenue

- Supports skill development and foster professionalism

Objectives

- To blend affordability with upscale services
- Empower women entrepreneurs
- Modernize community enterprises
- Promote Kerala's culinary heritage
- Expand reach and visibility
- Ensure professionalism and hygiene

Challenges Faced:

- Competition from established food chains
- Maintaining consistent quality across outlets.

Key Differences and Comparative Analysis

Aspects	Janakeeya Hotels	Premium Cafes
Target audience	Economically disadvantaged individuals	Affluent customers and tourists
Pricing	Highly affordable	Premium pricing
Ambience	Basic and functional	Modern aesthetically appealing
Menu	Simple, traditional dishes	Varied, including international cuisines
Location	Community centric neighborhoods	Highways, urban centers and tourist spots
Primary objectives	Food security and inclusivity	Revenue generation and modern dining
Social empowerment	Grassroots level empowerment	Professional growth and economic upliftment
Number	723	14

This comparison highlights how these initiatives cater to diverse needs while driving Kudumbashree's larger mission of women empowerment. While the Janakeeya hotel and Premium cafe operate in different spheres, they share a common thread of empowerment and community impact. The Janakeeya hotel addresses immediate social needs by combating hunger and providing affordable meals making it a vital part of Kerala's social safety net. On the other hand, the Premium cafe elevates the Kudumbashree brand, showcasing the potential of women entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector.

The dual approach highlights Kudumbashree's ability to adapt to diverse challenges and opportunities. By balancing social welfare with entrepreneurial ambition, these initiatives exemplify a holistic model of empowerment that is both inclusive and aspirational.

Shared Impact

- Promotes self-reliance among women.
- Sets a model for inclusive and sustainable development

Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study situated within Amartya Sen's capability approach, which emphasizes the expansion of human freedoms and the enhancement of substantive capabilities as the primary measure of development (Sen, 1999). Both the Janakeeya hotel and the Premium cafe models are institutional mechanisms for expanding the capabilities of women. The Janakeeya hotels advance what Amartya Sen terms "basic capabilities" – ensuring food security, social inclusion and a secure livelihood for women from vulnerable sections of society. The Premium cafe, on the other hand, operates at the level of combined capabilities, enabling women entrepreneurs to exercise agency in competitive professional environments, develop advanced skills and access new social and economic opportunities. Kudumbashree's dual-model approach is not merely a food-service strategy but a structured programme of capability expansion that tailors its interventions to the differing needs and aspirations of women across the socio-economic spectrum. This framework also has significant implications for social entrepreneurship theory, as both models demonstrate how community-driven organizations can simultaneously pursue social value creation and financial sustainability (Austin J, 2012) (M., P. A., & S., J., 2025)

Conclusion

Janakeeya hotels and Premium cafes exemplify Kudumbashree's multifaceted approach to community development. While Janakeeya hotels prioritize inclusivity and affordability, Premium cafes focus on professionalism and economic growth. Together, these initiatives showcase the potential of women-led enterprises in transforming both grassroots and urban economies. They not only address immediate societal needs but also contribute to long-term sustainability and empowerment. Kudumbashree's Janakeeya hotels and Premium Cafe are more than just dining establishments; they are symbols of resilience, innovation and empowerment. Together, they demonstrate how targeted interventions can address both grassroots needs and market aspirations, creating a comprehensive framework for sustainable development. As Kudumbashree continues to evolve, these initiatives serve as a testament to the transformative power of community-driven programs.

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