

Theertham : The 'Holy Water' from Kudumbashree Women of Kozhikode

The RO plant opened at Kozhikode Old Corporation office premises stand out unique because of the interventions it had made into the life of common man of Kozhikode. The RO plant is producing and distributing drinking water to almost all the households and shops in Kozhikode city limits. 'Theertham', as the name implies is being the holy water, distributed to the people of Kozhikode in reasonable prices during this time of water scarcity. Let us look into their success story. How these women had launched such a path breaking initiative and how they are reaping success from it.

Water scarcity

Water scarcity is defined as the lack of sufficient available fresh water resources to meet the water demands. It affects every continent and was listed in 2015 by the World Economic Forum as the largest global risk in terms of potential impact over the next decades. It is manifested by partial or no satisfaction of expressed demand, economic competition for water quantity or quality, disputes between users, irreversible depletion of groundwater, and negative impacts on the environment. Two-thirds of the global population live under conditions of severe water scarcity at least 1 month of the year, half a billion people in the world face severe water scarcity all year round. Half of the world's largest cities experience water scarcity.

Water scarcity in Kerala

Kerala is the state with large number of perennial strings, streams, rivers and other water bodies and with an average 3000 mm rain fall yearly, the unique water resource problem in the Kerala is that per capita availability of water is lower than national average. This is a result of accelerated surface water runoff to sea, which leaves little water for consumption and causes cycles of water abundance and water poverty.

In the present scenario of Kerala, drinking water scarcity is high and the availability of fresh drinking water is very low and a larger percentage people in Kerala, especially those living in the urban areas depend on bottled drinking water for meeting their needs. The shops and government offices, schools and other institutions use such bottled drinking water for overcoming the drinking water scarcity issue.

Bottled Drinking Water

Bottled water is drinking water (e.g., well water, distilled water, mineral water, or spring water) packaged in PET Bottle or Glass Water Bottles. Bottled water may be carbonated or not. Sizes range from small single serving bottles to large carboys for water coolers.

Bottled water services

It is not uncommon for business or individuals to subscribe to a bottled water service. Such services deliver water either monthly or weekly, sometimes even daily. Traditionally, water in glass bottles (jugs) was provided to electric coolers in areas of businesses without plumbing. Nowadays, plastic containers have replaced those glass jugs, however, dispensers at businesses now may stand alongside existing water taps or fountains.

Scope of Bottled Drinking Water in Kozhikode

The increasing population had contributed much to the water scarcity and the pollution is also evolved as a reason for water scarcity. The Bottled drinking water services has got a huge relevance in a city like Kozhikode as it is densely populated and Kozhikode city has evolved into a bigger market over these years.

Kudumbashree Mission's Interventions

Kudumbashree had launched the idea of launching a Reverse Osmosis Plant to produce bottled drinking water, as part of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission Project being implemented in Kerala. And the first drinking water plant was constructed at the Old corporation office premises. A five member team of Kudumbashree women was entrusted to supply the drinking water cans to 150 houses and residential apartments. A trail run was held for a week so that the members could make required changes when the operation turned into full swing. As the programme was found successful, the programme was officially

launched on 5 June 2017, the Environment day. The bottled drinking water was named as 'Theertham'.

Community Development Societies (CDS) of the Kudumbashree project office of the city corporation is implementing the project with the help of New Delhi based Dharna Infrastructure Private Limited. The public need to give a nominal charge of just Rs 20 for 20 litres of pure drinking water. The plant is located at the old corporation office and has the capacity to produce 2000 cans of water per day. The CDS had dug up tube well to ensure continuous water for the supply. The treatment plant at old corporation office is using reverse osmosis technology to treat the filtered water. The water will be then purified through ultraviolet treatment. The purified water stored in the stainless steel tanks will be distributed after packaging in bottles and canes. They are supplying an average of about 300 bottles per day.

The five membered team led by Smt. Latha is incharge of the initiative. A vehicle was hired for supplying the bottles to the needy and now they had got 2 vehicles to supply the bottles, as the need for Theertham drinking water had increased. The group had taken loan and they are repaying an amount of Rs.50,000 per month and are investing their shares of their income for the smooth running of the initiative itself.

Status so far

The initiative was widely appreciated by the people very much that at times the group may fail to reach to them. It is planned to buy more vehicles for the smooth delivery.

The office had started receiving request from offices and educational institutions even when it was decided to a conduct trail run for a week by distributing water to houses and apartments. The Theertham Drinking Water is affordable to everyone that 20 litres of water cost Rs 20 only which means that, it cost Rs 1 per litre.

The list of the bottles dispensed in every month is as follows:

Month	No. of bottles dispensed
June 2017	996
July 2017	2338
August 2017	3586
September 2017	3258
October 2017	3884
November 2017	4868
December 2017	5063
January 2018	5168

The nominal rate and good quality are the hallmark of Theertham packaged drinking water that more people are enquiring about the availability of the service even from distant places. It is also planned to start such RO plants in other places in the district in the next phase. The demand for purified drinking water can be better converted into an enterprise opportunity and the Mission intends to set 17 plants across the state. The project will be implemented in co-ordination with the concerned Local Self Governments.

Kudumbashree's interventions into this sector had ensured availability of healthy, safe and pure drinking water to the common people as well. For these women, this is not only a job to earn their living but also, it is a huge responsibility and service being served to the common people around them. Kudumbashree's path breaking initiative is therefore touching many lives and bringing happiness and life to them.