Kudumbashree, the women empowerment and poverty eradication programme, framed and enforced by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala, was established in 1998. The Mission envisages eradication of poverty by combining local economic development, promoting micro finance, starting livelihood activities in farming and non-farming sectors and implementing various activities in social development. As a community organization of Self Help Groups (SHG’s) of women in Kerala,
Kudumbashree has been recognized as an effective entity for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas, bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights or for empowerment. The overall empowerment of women is closely linked to economic empowerment. Kudumbashree Mission is also the nodal agency of many Government of India schemes such as NRLM, NULM, SVEP, DDUGKY, MKSP and PMAY.

The Mission has been creating micro enterprise opportunities to women through its strong community network. Currently, about 15,000 Kudumbashree women enterprises are running successfully in various areas of production, service and trade sectors. The Mission launched online retail market initiatives to find better market for the products of Kudumbashree micro enterprises. The Mission had indeed made a path-breaking gesture by launching www.kudumbashreebazaar.com. Kudumbashree Bazaar, the e-commerce portal to sell out Kudumbashree products was launched by Dr. K.T Jaleel, Minister, Local Self-Government Department, Government of Kerala then at Kanakakkunnu Palace, Thiruvananthapuram on February 21, 2018.

The Kudumbashree Executive Director S. Harikishore explained about the online market initiatives undertaken by the Mission, in an interaction with R. Ramabhadran Pillai.

What is the response from the public to the online sales initiative of Kudumbashree?

There is a huge demand for Kudumbashree products among the consumers, but there is a lack of marketing platforms which may satisfy the ultimate needs of its consumers, mostly among the non-Resident Indians.

An extended Kudumbashree...
Mission could satisfy the needs of its customers and reduce the gap between them by evolving several online marketing techniques like www.kudumbashreebazaar.com, AMAZON Saheli project, Flipkart, etc, many customers have positively adopted the change. They keep using the opportunity and have been giving suggestions for improving it. The responses that we receive from the public to the online sales initiatives of Kudumbashree are really exciting.

Do you think it is one of the potential marketing tools for Kudumbashree products?

Yes; we do believe that it is indeed one of the potential marketing tools for Kudumbashree products that even people from faraway places can avail themselves of the services of Kudumbashree to get the products now.

What percentage of sales of Kudumbashree retail products is happening online? What kind of revenue does it generate?

Online sales volume is less compared to the existing Kudumbashree marketing platforms such as monthly markets, Trade fairs, Permanent outlets, Nano markets, home shops, etc. All Kudumbashree online sales platforms are recently launched and now, we are focusing on increasing promotions so that more people know about this platform. Since many online selling platforms are gaining huge popularity and a large
volume of youngsters are migrating to online platforms for purchase, I think www.kudumbashreebazaar.com has a really bright future.

What are the factors that tend to restrict the growth of online business for Kudumbashree?

Increasing knowledge about this new initiative among various cross sections of the society is the present challenge that we face. Once we formulate new strategies for marketing and once we do it consistently, I think we will be able to achieve higher volume of sales and growth.

How do you prepare the Kudumbashree units to facilitate online sales? Are the members techno savvy to handle modern techniques of online sales?

Kudumbashree is providing regular training and capacity building to entrepreneurs and are facilitating the units to handle online sales. In the initial stage we are selecting one such entrepreneur who is able to handle online sales and we are planning to include more after regular training sessions and capacity building.

Over the years, Kudumbashree members had proven their inherent strengths. They pick up new ideas pretty fast and perform the best. Kudumbashree is really confident about its members.

Are you in a position to handle high level competition in the online market, especially with players such as Amazon dominating the market?

I think Kudumbashree products will enjoy a niche market and there won’t be any competition for the home-made tastes of Kerala. When talking about competition from other online platforms, I wish to say that we are not here for competition, but for convergence, partnerships and complementary wins. We have already partnered with Amazon and Kudumbashree products will be sold through Saheli platform as well.

Most of the products available on your online platform are produced locally and meant for local consumption. How does such a product range assume significance in the vast online market spread across the world?

It is not completely true; Kudumbashree products have huge demand in local market and across India because we have a trustworthy brand name that has gained wide acceptance among the consumers. We have a secure space in the market. Last year, Kudumbashree became a part of 20 SARAS fairs (National level fairs organized by Ministry of Rural Development) outside the State and the entre-
preneurs achieved Rs. 1 crore worth sales. The sales may increase this year.

Do you plan to sell products other than those produced by Kudumbashree units through the online platform?

We do not have any plans to sell products other than those produced by Kudumbashree units through our online platform. Our aim is to help Kudumbashree entrepreneurs to find market for their products. Only the products of Kudumbashree units would be sold through our online platform.

Do you think food prepared by Kudumbashree units fit to take on the online market players? Is there a plan to develop Apps for the purpose, similar to the ones existing in the market, such as Swiggy and Uber eats?

Yes, Kudumbashree cafe units are popular for traditional Kerala dishes. We are thinking about it.

What does future hold for Kudumbashree in terms of online retail business? Is the share of online sales bound to go up significantly?

In the upcoming years Kudumbashree Mission is planning to sell products of more micro enterprises through these online platforms and also planning to handle shipping of online orders (goods) by using our Community network.